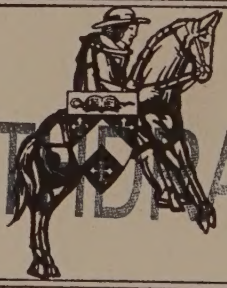
The Connecticut Wits

by

Henry A. Beers

KENYON COLLEGE LIBRARY

Library of
KENYON
COLLEGE

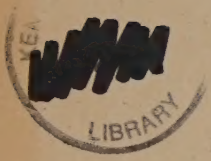


WITHDRAWN

THE GIFT OF
Fees and Fines

48124

804
B39



THE CONNECTICUT WITS

REPRINTS FROM THE YALE REVIEW

A Book of Yale Review Verse, 1917.

War Poems from The Yale Review, 1918.
(Second Edition, 1919.)

Four Americans: Roosevelt, Hawthorne, Emerson, Whitman, 1919.
(Second Printing, 1920.)

Milton's Tercentenary, 1910.

PUBLISHED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF
THE ELIZABETHAN CLUB OF YALE UNIVERSITY
ON THE FOUNDATION ESTABLISHED
IN MEMORY OF
OLIVER BATY CUNNINGHAM
OF THE CLASS OF 1917, YALE COLLEGE

THE CONNECTICUT WITS

AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

HENRY A. BEERS

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE EMERITUS

YALE UNIVERSITY

NEW HAVEN

YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS

LONDON · HUMPHREY MILFORD · OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

MDCCCCXX

COPYRIGHT, 1920, BY
YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CONTENTS

	PAGE
The Connecticut Wits	7
The Singer of the Old Swimmin' Hole	31
Emerson's Journals	45
The Art of Letter Writing . . .	69
Thackeray's Centenary	91
Retrospects and Prospects of the English Drama	115
Sheridan	159
The Poetry of the Cavaliers . . .	179
Abraham Cowley	195
Milton's Tercentenary	213
Shakespeare's Contemporaries . .	239

THE OLIVER BATY CUNNINGHAM MEMORIAL PUBLICATION FUND

THE present volume is the first work published by the Yale University Press on the Oliver Baty Cunningham Memorial Publication Fund. This Foundation was established May 8, 1920, by a gift from Frank S. Cunningham, Esq., of Chicago, to Yale University, in memory of his son, Captain Oliver Baty Cunningham, 15th United States Field Artillery, who was born in Chicago, September 17, 1894, and was graduated from Yale College in the Class of 1917. As an undergraduate he was distinguished alike for high scholarship and for proved capacity in leadership among his fellows, as evidenced by his selection as Gordon Brown Prize Man from his class. He received his commission as Second Lieutenant, United States Field Artillery, at the First Officers' Training Camp at Fort Sheridan, and in December, 1917, was detailed abroad for service, receiving subsequently the Distinguished Service Medal. He was killed while on active duty near Thiaucourt, France, on September 17, 1918, the twenty-fourth anniversary of his birth.

THE CONNECTICUT WITS

IN the days when Connecticut counted in the national councils; when it had *men* in the patriot armies, in Washington's Cabinet, in the Senate of the United States—men like Israel Putnam, Roger Sherman, Oliver Wolcott, Oliver Ellsworth,—in those same days there was a premature but interesting literary movement in our little commonwealth. A band of young graduates of Yale, some of them tutors in the college, or in residence for their Master's degree, formed themselves into a school for the cultivation of letters. I speak advisedly in calling them a school: they were a group of personal friends, united in sympathy by similar tastes and principles; and they had in common certain definite, coherent, and conscious aims. These were, first, to liberalize and modernize the rigidly scholastic curriculum of the college by the introduction of more elegant studies: the *belles lettres*, the *literae humaniores*. Such was the plea of John Trumbull in his Master's oration, "An Essay on the Use and Advantages of the Fine Arts," delivered at Commencement,

1770; and in his satire, "The Progress of Dulness," he had his hit at the dry and dead routine of college learning. Secondly, these young men resolved to supply the new republic with a body of poetry on a scale commensurate with the bigness of American scenery and the vast destinies of the nation: epics resonant as Niagara, and Pindaric odes lofty as our native mountains. And finally, when, at the close of the Revolutionary War, the members of the group found themselves reunited for a few years at Hartford, they set themselves to combat, with the weapon of satire, the influences towards lawlessness and separatism which were delaying the adoption of the Constitution.

My earliest knowledge of this literary coterie was derived from an article in *The Atlantic Monthly* for February, 1865, "The Pleiades of Connecticut." The "Pleiades," to wit, were John Trumbull, Timothy Dwight, David Humphreys, Lemuel Hopkins, Richard Alsop, and Theodore Dwight. The tone of the article was ironic. "Connecticut is pleasant," it said, "with wooded hills and a beautiful river; plenteous with tobacco and cheese; fruitful of merchants, missionaries, peddlers, and single women,—but there are no poets known to exist there . . . the brisk little democratic state has turned its brains upon its machinery . . . the enterprising

natives can turn out any article on which a profit can be made—except poetry."

Massachusetts has always been somewhat condescending towards Connecticut's literary pretensions. Yet all through that very volume of the *Atlantic*, from which I quote, run Mrs. Stowe's "Chimney Corner" papers and Donald Mitchell's novel, "Doctor Johns"; with here and there a story by Rose Terry and a poem by Henry Brownell. Nay, in an article entitled "Our Battle Laureate," in the May number of the magazine, the "Autocrat" himself, who would always have his fling at Connecticut theology and Connecticut spelling and pronunciation ("Webster's provincials," forsooth! though *pater ipse*, the Rev. Abiel, had been a Connecticut orthodox parson, a Yale graduate, and a son-in-law of President Stiles),—the "Autocrat," I say, takes off his hat to my old East Hartford neighbor, Henry Howard Brownell.

He begins by citing the paper which I have been citing: "How came the Muses to settle in Connecticut? . . . But the seed of the Muses has run out. No more Pleiades in Hartford . . ."; and answers that, if the author of the article asks Nathanael's question, putting Hartford for Nazareth, he can refer him to Brownell's "Lyrics of a Day." "If Drayton had fought at Agincourt, if Campbell had held a sabre at Hohenlinden,

if Scott had been in the saddle with Marmion, if Tennyson had charged with the six hundred at Balaclava, each of these poets might possibly have pictured what he said as faithfully and as fearfully as Mr. Brownell has painted the sea fights in which he took part as a combatant."

Many years later, when preparing a chapter on the literature of the county for the "Memorial History of Hartford," I came to close quarters with the sweet influence of the Pleiades. I am one of the few men —perhaps I am the only man—now living who have read the whole of Joel Barlow's "Columbiad." "Is old Joel Barlow yet alive?" asks Hawthorne's crazy correspondent. "Unconscionable man! . . . And *does* he meditate an epic on the war between Mexico and Texas, with machinery contrived on the principle of the steam engine?" I also "perused" (good old verb—the right word for the deed!) Dwight's "Greenfield Hill"—a meritorious action,—but I cannot pretend to have read his "Conquest of Canaän" (the diaeresis is his, not mine), an epic in eleven books and in heroic couplets. I dipped into it only far enough to note that the poet had contrived to introduce a history of our Revolutionary War, by way of episode, among the wars of Israel.

It must be acknowledged that this patri-

otic enterprise of creating a national literature by *tour de force*, was undertaken when Minerva was unwilling. These were able and eminent men: scholars, diplomatists, legislators. Among their number were a judge of the Connecticut Supreme Court, a college president, foreign ministers and ambassadors, a distinguished physician, an officer of the Revolutionary army, intimate friends of Washington and Jefferson. But, as poetry, a few little pieces of the New Jersey poet, Philip Freneau,—"The Indian Student," "The Indian Burying Ground," "To a Honey Bee," "The Wild Honeysuckle," and "The Battle of Eutaw Springs,"—are worth all the epic and Pindaric strains of the Connecticut bards. Yet "still the shore a brave attempt resounds." For they had few misgivings and a truly missionary zeal. They formed the first Mutual Admiration Society in our literary annals.

Here gallant Humphreys charm'd the list'ning throng.
Sweetly he sang, amid the clang of arms,
His numbers smooth, replete with winning charms.
In him there shone a great and godlike mind,
The poet's wreath around the laurel twined.

This was while Colonel Humphreys was in the army—one of Washington's aides. But

when he resigned his commission,—hark! 'tis Barlow sings:—

See Humphreys glorious from the field retire,
Sheathe the glad sword and string the sounding lyre.
O'er fallen friends, with all the strength of woe,
His heartfelt sighs in moving numbers flow.
His country's wrongs, her duties, dangers, praise,
Fire his full soul, and animate his lays.

Humphreys, in turn, in his poem "On the Future Glory of the United States of America," calls upon his learned friends to string *their* lyres and rouse their countrymen against the Barbary corsairs who were holding American seamen in captivity:—

Why sleep'st thou, Barlow, child of genius? Why
See'st thou, blest Dwight, our land in sadness lie?
And where is Trumbull, earliest boast of fame?
'Tis yours, ye bards, to wake the smothered flame.
To you, my dearest friends, the task belongs
To rouse your country with heroic songs.

Yes, to be sure, where *is* Trumbull, earliest boast of fame? He came from Watertown (now a seat of learning), a cousin of Governor Trumbull—"Brother Jonathan"—and a second cousin of Colonel John Trumbull,

the historical painter, whose battle pieces repose in the Yale Art Gallery. Cleverness runs in the Trumbull blood. There was, for example, J. Hammond Trumbull (abbreviated by lisping infancy to "J. Hambull") in the last generation, a great sagamore—O a very big Indian,—reputed the only man in the country who could read Eliot's Algonquin Bible. I make no mention of later Trumbulls known in letters and art. But as for our worthy, John Trumbull, the poet, it is well known and has been often told how he passed the college entrance examination at the age of seven, but forebore to matriculate till a more reasonable season, graduating in 1767 and serving two years as a tutor along with his friend Dwight; afterwards studying law at Boston in the office of John Adams, practising at New Haven and Hartford, filling legislative and judicial positions, and dying at Detroit in 1831.

Trumbull was the satirist of the group. As a young man at Yale, he amused his leisure by contributing to the newspapers essays in the manner of "The Spectator" ("The Meddler," "The Correspondent," and the like); and verse satires after the fashion of Prior and Pope. There is nothing very new about the Jack Dapperwits, Dick Hairbrains, Tom Brainlesses, Miss Harriet Simpers, and Isabella Sprightlys of these com-

positions. The very names will recall to the experienced reader the stock figures of the countless Addisonian imitations which sicklied o'er the minor literature of the eighteenth century. But Trumbull's masterpiece was "M'Fingal," a Hudibrastic satire on the Tories, printed in part at Philadelphia in 1776, and in complete shape at Hartford in 1782, "by Hudson and Goodwin near the Great Bridge." "M'Fingal" was the most popular poem of the Revolution. It went through more than thirty editions in America and England. In 1864 it was edited with elaborate historical notes by Benson J. Lossing, author of "Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution." A reprint is mentioned as late as 1881. An edition, in two volumes, of Trumbull's poetical works was issued in 1820.

Timothy Dwight pronounced "M'Fingal" superior to "Hudibras." The Marquis de Chastellux, who had fought with Lafayette for the independence of the colonies; who had been amused when at Windham, says my authority, by Governor Jonathan Trumbull's "pompous manner in transacting the most trifling public business"; and who translated into French Colonel Humphreys's poetical "Address to the Armies of the United States of America,"—Chastellux wrote to Trumbull *à propos* of his burlesque:

"I believe that you have rifled every flower which that kind of poetry could offer. . . . I prefer it to every work of the kind,—even 'Hudibras.'" And Moses Coit Tyler, whose four large volumes on our colonial and revolutionary literature are, for the most part, a much ado about nothing, waxes dithyrambic on this theme. He speaks, for example, of "the vast and prolonged impression it has made upon the American people." But surely all this is very uncritical. All that is really alive of "M'Fingal" are a few smart couplets usually attributed to "Hudibras," such as—

> No man e'er felt the halter draw
> With good opinion of the law.

"M'Fingal" is one of the most successful of the innumerable imitations of "Hudibras"; still it is an imitation, and, as such, inferior to its original. But apart from that, Trumbull was far from having Butler's astonishing resources of wit and learning, tedious as they often are from their mere excess. Nor is the Yankee sharpness of "M'Fingal" so potent a spirit as the harsh, bitter contempt of Butler, almost as inventive of insult as the *saeva indignatio* of Swift. Yet "M'Fingal" still keeps a measure of historical importance, reflecting, in its cracked and distorted mirror of caricature, the features of a stormy time: the turbulent town meetings,

the liberty poles and bonfires of the patriots; with the tar-and-feathering of Tories, and their stolen gatherings in cellars or other holes and corners.

After peace was declared, a number of these young writers came together again in Hartford, where they formed a sort of literary club with weekly meetings—"The Hartford Wits," who for a few years made the little provincial capital the intellectual metropolis of the country. Trumbull had settled at Hartford in the practice of the law in 1781. Joel Barlow, who had hastily qualified for a chaplaincy in a Massachusetts brigade by a six weeks' course of theology, and had served more or less sporadically through the war, came to Hartford in the year following and started a newspaper. David Humphreys, Yale 1771, illustrious founder of the Brothers in Unity Society, and importer of merino sheep, had enlisted in 1776 in a Connecticut militia regiment then on duty in New York. He had been on the staff of General Putnam, whose life he afterwards wrote; had been Washington's aide and a frequent inmate at Mount Vernon from 1780 to 1783; then abroad (1784-1786), as secretary to the commission for making commercial treaties with the nations of Europe. (The commissioners were Franklin, Adams, and Jefferson.) On returning to

his native Derby in 1786, he had been sent to the legislature at Hartford, and now found himself associated with Trumbull, who had entered upon his Yale tutorship in 1771, the year of Humphreys's graduation; and with Barlow, who had taken his B.A. degree in 1778. These three Pleiades drew to themselves other stars of lesser magnitude, the most remarkable of whom was Dr. Lemuel Hopkins, a native of Waterbury, but since 1784 a practising physician at Hartford and one of the founders of the Connecticut Medical Society. Hopkins was an eccentric humorist, and is oddly described by Samuel Goodrich—"Peter Parley"—as "long and lank, walking with spreading arms and straddling legs." "His nose was long, lean, and flexible," adds Goodrich,—a description which suggests rather the proboscis of the elephant, or at least of the tapir, than a feature of the human countenance.

Other lights in this constellation were Richard Alsop, from Middletown, who was now keeping a bookstore at Hartford, and Theodore Dwight, brother to Timothy and brother-in-law to Alsop, and later the secretary and historian of the famous Hartford Convention of 1814, which came near to carrying New England into secession. We might reckon as an eighth Pleiad, Dr. Elihu H. Smith, then residing at Wethersfield, who

published in 1793 our first poetic miscellany, printed—of all places in the world—at Litchfield, "mine own romantic town": seat of the earliest American law school, and emitter of this earliest American anthology. If you should happen to find in your garret a dusty copy of this collection, "American Poems, Original and Selected," by Elihu H. Smith, hold on to it. It is worth money, and will be worth more.

The Hartford Wits contributed to local papers, such as the *New Haven Gazette* and the *Connecticut Courant*, a series of political lampoons: "The Anarchiad," "The Echo," and "The Political Greenhouse," a sort of Yankee "Dunciad," "Rolliad," and "Anti-Jacobin." They were staunch Federalists, friends of a close union and a strong central government; and used their pens in support of the administrations of Washington and Adams, and to ridicule Jefferson and the Democrats. It was a time of great confusion and unrest: of Shays's Rebellion in Massachusetts, and the irredeemable paper currency in Rhode Island. In Connecticut, Democratic mobs were protesting against the vote of five years' pay to the officers of the disbanded army. "The Echo" and "The Political Greenhouse" were published in book form in 1807; "The Anarchiad" not till 1861, by Thomas H. Pease, New Haven, with

notes and introduction by Luther G. Riggs. I am not going to quote these satires. They amused their own generation and doubtless did good. "The Echo" had the honor of being quoted in Congress by an angry Virginian, to prove that Connecticut was trying to draw the country into a war with France. It caught up cleverly the humors of the day, now travestying a speech of Jefferson, now turning into burlesque a Boston town meeting. A local flavor is given by allusions to Connecticut traditions: Captain Kidd, the Blue Laws, the Windham Frogs, the Hebron pump, the Wethersfield onion gardens. But the sparkle has gone out of it. There is a perishable element in political satire. I find it difficult to interest young people nowadays even in the "Biglow Papers," which are so much superior, in every way, to "M'Fingal" or "The Anarchiad."

Timothy Dwight would probably have rested his title to literary fame on his five volumes of theology and the eleven books of his "Conquest of Canaän." But the epic is unread and unreadable, while theological systems need constant restatement in an age of changing beliefs. There is one excellent hymn by Dwight in the collections,—"I love thy kingdom, Lord." His war song, "Columbia, Columbia, in glory arise," was once admired, but has faded. I have found it pos-

sible to take a mild interest in the long poem, "Greenfield Hill," a partly idyllic and partly moral didactic piece, emanating from the country parish, three miles from the Sound, in the town of Fairfield, where Dwight was pastor from 1783 to 1795. The poem has one peculiar feature: each of its seven parts was to have imitated the manner of some one British poet. Part One is in the blank verse and the style of Thomson's "Seasons"; Part Two in the heroic couplets and the diction of Goldsmith's "Traveller" and "Deserted Village." For lack of time this design was not systematically carried out, but the reader is reminded now of Prior, then of Cowper, and again of Crabbe. The nature descriptions and the pictures of rural life are not untruthful, though somewhat tame and conventional. The praise of modest competence is sung, and the wholesome simplicity of American life, under the equal distribution of wealth, as contrasted with the luxury and corruption of European cities. Social questions are discussed, such as, "The state of negro slavery in Connecticut"; and "What is not, and what is, a social female visit." Narrative episodes give variety to the descriptive and reflective portions: the burning of Fairfield in 1779 by the British under Governor Tryon; the destruction of the remnants of the Pequod Indians in a swamp

three miles west of the town. It is distressing to have the Yankee farmer called "the swain," and his wife and daughter "the fair," in regular eighteenth century style; and Long Island, which is always in sight and frequently apostrophized, personified as "Longa."

Then on the borders of this sapphire plain
Shall growing beauties grace my fair domain
. . . . .
Gay groves exult: Chinesian gardens glow,
And bright reflections paint the wave below.

The poet celebrates Connecticut artists and inventors:—

Such forms, such deeds on Rafael's tablets shine,
And such, O Trumbull, glow alike on thine.

David Bushnell of Saybrook had invented a submarine torpedo boat, nicknamed "the American Turtle," with which he undertook to blow up Lord Admiral Howe's gunship in New York harbor. Humphreys gives an account of the failure of this enterprise in his "Life of Putnam." It was some of Bushnell's machines, set afloat on the Delaware, among the British shipping, that occasioned the panic celebrated in Hopkinson's satirical ballad, "The Battle of the Kegs," which we used to declaim at school. "See," exclaims Dwight,—

See Bushnell's strong creative genius, fraught
With all th' assembled powers of skillful thought,
His mystic vessel plunge beneath the waves
And glide through dark retreats and coral caves!

Dr. Holmes, who knew more about Yale poets than they know about each other, has rescued one line from "Greenfield Hill." "The last we see of snow," he writes, in his paper on "The Seasons," "is, in the language of a native poet,

The lingering drift behind the shady wall.

This is from a bard more celebrated once than now, Timothy Dwight, the same from whom we borrowed the piece we used to speak, beginning (as we said it),

Columby, Columby, to glory arise!

The line with the drift in it has stuck in my memory like a feather in an old nest, and is all that remains to me of his 'Greenfield Hill.'"

As President of Yale College from 1795 to 1817, Dr. Dwight, by his sermons, addresses, and miscellaneous writings, his personal influence with young men, and his public spirit, was a great force in the community. I have an idea that his "Travels in

New England and New York," posthumously published in 1821-1822, in four volumes, will survive all his other writings. I can recommend Dwight's "Travels" as a really entertaining book, and full of solid observation.

Of all the wooden poetry of these Connecticut bards, David Humphreys's seems to me the woodenest,—big patriotic verse essays on the model of the "Essay on Man"; "Address to the Armies of the United States"; "On the Happiness of America"; "On the Future Glory of the United States"; "On the Love of Country"; "On the Death of George Washington," etc. Yet Humphreys was a most important figure. He was plenipotentiary to Portugal and Spain, and a trusted friend of Washington, from whom, perhaps, he caught that stately deportment which is said to have characterized him. He imported a hundred merino sheep from Spain, landing them from shipboard at his native Derby, then a port of entry on the lordly Housatonic. He wrote a dissertation on merino sheep, and also celebrated the exploit in song. The Massachusetts Agricultural Society gave him a gold medal for his services in improving the native breed. But if these sheep are even remotely responsible for Schedule K, it might be wished that they had remained in Spain, or had been as the flocks of Bo-Peep. Colonel Humphreys died at New Haven in

1818. The college owns his portrait by Stuart, and his monument in Grove Street cemetery is dignified by a Latin inscription reciting his titles and achievements, and telling how, like a second Jason, he brought the *auream vellerem* from Europe to Connecticut. Colonel Humphreys's works were handsomely published at New York in 1804, with a list of subscribers headed by their Catholic Majesties, the King and Queen of Spain, and followed by Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and numerous dukes and chevaliers. Among the humbler subscribers I am gratified to observe the names of Nathan Beers, merchant, New Haven; and Isaac Beers & Co., booksellers, New Haven (six copies),—no ancestors but conjecturally remote collateral relatives of the undersigned.

I cannot undertake to quote from Humphreys's poems. The patriotic feeling that prompted them was genuine; the descriptions of campaigns in which he himself had borne a part have a certain value; but the poetry as such, though by no means contemptible, is quite uninspired. Homer's catalogue of ships is a hackneyed example of the way in which a great poet can make bare names poetical. Humphreys had a harder job, and passages of his battle pieces read like pages from a city directory.

As fly autumnal leaves athwart some dale,
Borne on the pinions of the sounding gale,
Or glides the gossamer o'er rustling reeds,
Bland's, Sheldon's, Moylan's, Baylor's battle steeds
So skimmed the plain. . . .
Then Huger, Maxwell, Mifflin, Marshall, Read,
Hastened from states remote to seize the meed;
. . . . . .
While Smallwood, Parsons, Shepherd, Irvine, Hand,
Guest, Weedon, Muhlenberg, leads each his band.

Does the modern reader recognize a forefather among these heroic patronymics? Just as good men as fought at Marathon or Agincourt. Nor can it be said of any one of them *quia caret vate sacro.*

But the loudest blast upon the trump of fame was blown by Joel Barlow. It was agreed that in him America had produced a supreme poet. Born at Redding,—where Mark Twain died the other day,—the son of a farmer, Barlow was graduated at Yale in 1778—just a hundred years before President Taft. He married the daughter of a Guilford blacksmith, who had moved to New Haven to educate his sons; one of whom, Abraham Baldwin, afterwards went to Georgia, grew up with the country, and became United States Senator.

After the failure of his Hartford journal, Barlow went to France, in 1788, as agent of the Scioto Land Company, which turned out to be a swindling concern. He now "embraced French principles," that is, became a Jacobin and freethinker, to the scandal of his old Federalist friends. He wrote a song to the guillotine and sang it at festal gatherings in London. He issued other revolutionary literature, in particular an "Advice to the Privileged Orders," suppressed by the British government; whereupon Barlow, threatened with arrest, went back to France. The Convention made him a French citizen; he speculated luckily in the securities of the republic, which rose rapidly with the victories of its armies. He lived in much splendor in Paris, where Robert Fulton, inventor of steamboats, made his home with him for seven years. In 1795, he was appointed United States consul to Algiers, resided there two years, and succeeded in negotiating the release of the American captives who had been seized by Algerine pirates. After seventeen years' absence, he returned to America, and built a handsome country house on Rock Creek, Washington, which he named characteristically "Kalorama." He had become estranged from orthodox New England, and lived on intimate terms with Jefferson and the Demo-

cratic leaders, French sympathizers, and philosophical deists.

In 1811 President Madison sent him as minister plenipotentiary to France, to remonstrate with the emperor on the subject of the Berlin and Milan decrees, which were injuring American commerce. He was summoned to Wilna, Napoleon's headquarters in his Russian campaign, where he was promised a personal interview. But the retreat from Moscow had begun. Fatigue and exposure brought on an illness from which Barlow died in a small Polish village near Cracow. An elaborate biography, "The Life and Letters of Joel Barlow," by Charles Burr Todd, was published by G. P. Putnam's Sons in 1886.

Barlow's most ambitious undertaking was the "Columbiad," originally printed at Hartford in 1787 as "The Vision of Columbus," and then reissued in its expanded form at Philadelphia in 1807: a sumptuous quarto with plates by the best English and French engravers from designs by Robert Fulton: altogether the finest specimen of bookmaking that had then appeared in America. The "Columbiad's" greatness was in inverse proportion to its bigness. Grandiosity was its author's besetting sin, and the plan of the poem is absurdly grandiose. It tells how Hesper appeared to Columbus in prison and

led him to a hill of vision whence he viewed the American continents spread out before him, and the panorama of their whole future history unrolled. Among other things he saw the Connecticut river—

Thy stream, my Hartford, through its misty robe,
Played in the sunbeams, belting far the globe.
No watery glades through richer vallies shine,
Nor drinks the sea a lovelier wave than thine.

It is odd to come upon familiar place-names swollen to epic pomp. There is Danbury, for example, which one associates with the manufacture of hats and a somewhat rowdy annual fair. In speaking of the towns set on fire by the British, the poet thus exalteth Danbury, whose flames were visible from native Redding:—

Norwalk expands the blaze; o'er Redding hills
High flaming Danbury the welkin fills.
Esopus burns, New York's deliteful fanes
And sea-nursed Norfolk light the neighboring plains.

But Barlow's best poem was "Hasty Pudding," a mock-heroic after the fashion of Philips's "Cider," and not, I think, inferior to that. One couplet, in particular, has prevailed against the tooth of time:—

E'en in thy native regions how I blush
To hear the Pennsylvanians call thee mush!

This poem was written in 1792 in Savoy, whither Barlow had gone to stand as deputy to the National Convention. In a little inn at Chambéry, a bowl of *polenta*, or Indian meal pudding, was set before him, and the familiar dish made him homesick for Connecticut. You remember how Dr. Holmes describes the dinners of the young American medical students in Paris at the *Trois Frères;* and how one of them would sit tinkling the ice in his wineglass, "saying that he was hearing the cowbells as he used to hear them, when the deep-breathing kine came home at twilight from the huckleberry pasture in the old home a thousand leagues towards the sunset."

THE SINGER OF THE OLD SWIMMIN' HOLE

MANY years ago I said to one of Walt Whitman's biographers: "Whitman may, as you claim, be the poet of democracy, but he is not the poet of the American people. He is the idol of a literary *culte*. Shall I tell you who the poet of the American people is just at present? He is James Whitcomb Riley of Indiana." Riley used to become quite blasphemous when speaking of Whitman. He said that the latter had begun by scribbling newspaper poetry of the usual kind—and very poor of its kind—which had attracted no attention and deserved none. Then he suddenly said to himself: "Go to! I will discard metre and rhyme and write something startlingly eccentric which will make the public sit up and take notice. I will sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world, and the world will say—as in fact it did—'here is a new poetry, lawless, virile, democratic. It is so different from anything hitherto written, that here must be the great American poet at last.'"

Now, I am not going to disparage old

Walt. He was big himself, and he had an extraordinary feeling of the bigness of America with its swarming multitudes, millions of the plain people, whom God must have loved, said Lincoln, since he made so many of them. But all this in the mass. As to any dramatic power to discriminate among individuals and characterize them singly, as Riley does, Whitman had none. They are all alike, all "leaves of grass."

Well, my friend, and Walt Whitman's, promised to read Riley's poems. And shortly I got a letter from him saying that he had read them with much enjoyment, but adding, "Surely you would not call him a great national poet." Now since his death, the newspaper critics have been busy with this question. His poetry was true, sweet, original; but was it great? Suppose we leave aside for the moment this question of greatness. Who are the great poets, anyway? Was Robert Burns one of them? He composed no epics, no tragedies, no high Pindaric odes. But he made the songs of the Scottish people, and is become a part of the national consciousness of the race. In a less degree, but after the same fashion, Riley's poetry has taken possession of the popular heart. I am told that his sales outnumber Longfellow's. This is not an ultimate test, but so far as it goes it is a valid one.

SINGER OF THE OLD SWIMMIN' HOLE

Riley is the Hoosier poet, but he is more than that: he is a national poet. His state and his city have honored themselves in honoring him and in keeping his birthday as a public holiday. The birthdays of nations and of kings and magistrates have been often so kept. We have our fourth of July, our twenty-second of February, our Lincoln's birthday; and we had a close escape from having a McKinley day. I do not know that the banks are closed and the children let out of school—Riley's children, for all children are his—on each succeeding seventh of October; but I think there is no record elsewhere in our literary history of a tribute so loving and so universal to a mere man of letters, as the Hoosier State pays annually to its sweet singer. Massachusetts has its poets and is rightly proud of them, but neither Bryant nor Emerson nor Lowell nor Holmes, nor the more popular Longfellow or Whittier, has had his natal day marked down on the calendar as a yearly state *festa*. And yet poets, novelists, playwriters, painters, musical composers, artists of all kinds, have added more to the sum of human happiness than all the kings and magistrates that ever lived. Perhaps Indianians are warmer hearted than New Englanders; or perhaps they make so much of their poets because there are fewer of them. But this is not the whole secret of it.

In a sense, Riley's poems are provincial. They are intensely true to local conditions, local scenery and dialect, childish memories and the odd ways and characters of little country towns. But just for this faithfulness to their environment these "poems here at home" come home to others whose homes are far away from the Wabash, but are not so very different after all.

America, as has often been said, is a land of homes: of dwellers in villages, on farms, and in small towns. We are common people, middle-class people, conservative, decent, religious, tenacious of old ways, home-keeping and home-loving. We do not thrill to Walt Whitman's paeans to democracy in the abstract; but we vibrate to every touch on the chord of family affections, of early friendships, and of the dear old homely things that our childhood knew. Americans are sentimental and humorous; and Riley abounds in sentiment—wholesome sentiment—and natural humor, while Whitman had little of either.

To all Americans who were ever boys; to all, at least who have had the good luck to be country boys and go barefoot; whether they dwell in the prairie states of the Middle West, or elsewhere, the scenes and characters of Riley's poems are familiar: Little Orphant Annie and the Raggedy Man, and

the Old Swimmin' Hole and Griggsby's Station "where we ust to be so happy and so pore." They know when the frost is on the "punkin," and that the "Gobble-uns 'll git you ef you don't watch out"; and how the old tramp said to the Raggedy Man:—

> You're a *purty* man!—*You* air!—
> With a pair o' eyes like two fried eggs,
> An' a nose like a Bartlutt pear!

They have all, in their time, followed along after the circus parade, listened to the old village band playing tunes like "Lily Dale" and "In the Hazel Dell my Nellie's Sleeping" and "Rosalie, the Prairie Flower"; have heard the campaign stump speaker when he "cut loose on monopolies and cussed and cussed and cussed"; have belonged to the literary society which debated the questions whether fire or water was the most destructive element; whether town life was preferable to country life; whether the Indian or the negro had suffered more at the hands of the white man; or whether the growth of Roman Catholicism in this country is a menace to our free institutions. And *was* the execution of Charles the First justifiable? Charles is dead now; but this good old debate question will never die. They knew the joys of "eatin' out on the porch" and the woes of having your sister lose your jackknife

through a crack in the barn floor; or of tearing your thumb nail in trying to get the nickel out of the tin savings bank.

The poets we admire are many; the poets we love are few. One of the traits that endear Riley to his countrymen is his cheerfulness. He is "Sunny Jim." The south wind and the sun are his playmates. The drop of bitterness mixed in the cup of so many poets seems to have been left out of his life potion. And so, while he does not rouse us with "the thunder of the trumpets of the night," or move us with the deep organ tones of tragic grief, he never fails to hearten and console. And though tragedy is absent from his verse, a tender pathos, kindred to his humor, is everywhere present. Read over again "The Old Man and Jim," or "Nothin' to Say, my Daughter," or any of his poems on the deaths of children; for a choice that poignant little piece, "The Lost Kiss," comparable with Coventry Patmore's best poem, "The Toys," in which the bereaved father speaks his unavailing remorse because he had once spoken crossly to his little girl when she came to his desk for a good-night kiss and interrupted him at his work.

Riley followed the bent of his genius and gave himself just the kind of training that fitted him to do his work. He never had any regular education, adopted no trade or pro-

fession, never married and had children, but kept himself free from set tasks and from those responsibilities which distract the poet's soul. His muse was a truant, and he was a runaway schoolboy who kept the heart of a boy into manhood and old age, which is one definition of genius. He was better employed when he joined a circus troupe or a travelling medicine van, or set up as a sign painter, or simply lay out on the grass, "knee deep in June," than if he had shut himself up in a school or an office. He did no routine work, but wrote when he felt like it, when he was in the mood. Fortunately the mood recurred abundantly, and so we have about two dozen volumes from him, filled with lovely poetry. Most of us do hack work, routine work, because we can do nothing better. But for the creative artist, hack work is a waste. Creative work, when one is in the mood, is more a pleasure than a toil; and Riley worked hard at his verse-making. For he was a most conscientious artist; and all those poems of his, seemingly so easy, natural, spontaneous, were the result of labor, though of labor joyously borne. How fine his art was perhaps only those can fully appreciate who have tried their own hands at making verses. Some of the things that he said to me about the use and abuse of dialect in poetry and concerning similar

points, showed me how carefully he had thought out the principles of composition.

He thought most dialect poetry was overdone; recalling that delightful anecdote about the member of the Chicago Browning Club who was asked whether he liked dialect verse, and who replied: "Some of it. Eugene Field is all right. But the other day I read some verses by a fellow named Chaucer, and he carries it altogether too far."

In particular, Riley objected to the habit which many writers have of labelling their characters with descriptive names like Sir Lucius O'Trigger and Birdofredum Sawin. I reminded him that English comedy from "Ralph Roister Doister" down had practised this device. (In Ben Jonson it is the rule.) And that even such an artist as Thackeray employed it frequently with droll effect: Lady Jane Sheepshanks, daughter of the Countess of Southdown, and so forth. But he insisted that it was a departure from *vraisemblance* which disturbed the impression of reality.

In seeking to classify these Hoosier poems, we are forced back constantly to a comparison with the Doric singers: with William Barnes, the Dorsetshire dialect poet; and above all with Robert Burns. Wordsworth in his "Lyrical Ballads," and Tennyson in his few rural idyls like "Dora" and "The Brook"

dealt also with simple, country life, the life of Cumberland dalesmen and Lincolnshire farmers. But these poets are in another class. They are grave philosophers, cultivated scholars, university men, writing in academic English; writing with sympathy indeed, but from a point of view outside the life which they depict. In our own country there are Will Carleton's "Farm Ballads," handling the same homely themes as Riley's; handling them truthfully, sincerely, but prosaically. Carleton could not

> . . . add the gleam,
> The light that never was, on sea or land,
> The consecration, and the poet's dream.

But Riley's world of common things and plain folks is always lit up by the lamp of beauty. Then there is Whittier. He was a farmer lad, and was part of the life that he wrote of. He belonged; and, like Riley, he knew his Burns. I think, indeed, that "Snow-Bound" is a much better poem than "The Cotter's Saturday Night." Whittier's fellow Quaker, John Bright, in an address to British workingmen, advised them to read Whittier's poems, if they wanted to understand the spirit of the American people. Well, the spirit of New England, let us say, if not of all America. For Whittier is in some ways provincial, and rightly so. But though he

uses homely New England words like "chore," he does not, so far as I remember, essay dialect except in "Skipper Ireson's Ride"; and that is Irish if it is anything. No Yankee women known to me talk like the fishwives of Marblehead in that popular but overrated piece. Then there are the "Biglow Papers," which remind of Riley's work on the humorous, as Whittier's ballads do on the serious side. Lowell made a careful study of the New England dialect and the "Biglow Papers" are brilliantly true to the shrewd Yankee wit; but they are political satires rather than idyls. Where they come nearest to these Hoosier ballads or to "Sunthin' in the Pastoral Line" is where they record old local ways and institutions. "This kind o' sogerin," writes Birdofredum Sawin, who is disgustedly campaigning in Mexico, like our National Guards of yesterday:—

This kind o' sogerin' aint a mite like our October trainin',
A chap could clear right out from there ef 't only looked like rainin',
An' th' Cunnles, tu, could kiver up their shappoes with bandanners,
An' send the insines skootin' to the bar-room with their banners
(Fear o' gittin' on 'em spotted), . . .

Isn't that something like Riley? Lowell, of course, is a more imposing literary figure,

and he tapped intellectual sources to which the younger poet had no access. But I still think Riley the finer artist. Benjamin F. Johnson, of Boone, the quaint, simple, innocent old Hoosier farmer, is a more convincing person than Hosea Biglow. In many of the "Biglow Papers" sentiment, imagery, vocabulary, phrase, are often too elevated for the speaker and for his dialect. Riley is not guilty of this inconsistency; his touch here is absolutely correct.

Riley's work was anything but academic; and I am therefore rather proud of the fact that my university was the first to confer upon him an honorary degree. I cannot quite see why geniuses like Mark Twain and Riley, whose books are read and loved by hundreds of thousands of their countrymen, should care very much for a college degree. The fact remains, however, that they are gratified by the compliment, which stamps their performances with a sort of official sanction, like the *couronné par l'Académie Française* on the title-page of a French author.

When Mr. Riley came on to New Haven to take his Master's degree, he was a bit nervous about making a public appearance in unwonted conditions; although he had been used to facing popular audiences with great applause when he gave his delightful readings from his own poems, with humorous imper-

sonations in prose as good as Beatrice Herford's best monologues. He rehearsed the affair in advance, trying on his Master's gown and reading me his poem, "No Boy Knows when He Goes to Sleep," which he proposed to use if called on for a speech. He asked me if it would do: it did. For at the alumni dinner which followed the conferring of degrees, when Riley got to his feet and read the piece, the audience broke loose. It was evident that, whatever the learned gentlemen on the platform might think, the undergraduates and the young alumni knew their Riley; and that his enrolment on the Yale catalogue was far and away the most popular act of the day. For in truth there is nothing cloistral or high and dry among our modern American colleges. A pessimist on my own faculty even avers that the average undergraduate nowadays reads nothing beyond the sporting columns in the New York newspapers. There were other distinguished recipients of degrees at that same Commencement. One leading statesman was made a Doctor of Laws: Mr. Riley a Master of Arts. Of course a mere man of letters cannot hope to rank with a politician. If Shakespeare and Ben Butler had been contemporaries and had both come up for a degree at the same Commencement—supposing any college willing to notice Butler at all—why Ben would have got an LL.D.

and William an M.A. Yet exactly why should this be so? For as I am accustomed to say of John Hay, anybody can be Secretary of State, but it took a smart man to write "Little Breeches" and "The Mystery of Gilgal."

EMERSON AND HIS JOURNALS

THE publication of Emerson's journals,* kept for over half a century, is a precious gift to the reading public. It is well known that he made an almost daily record of his thoughts: that, when called upon for a lecture or address, he put together such passages as would dovetail, without too anxious a concern for unity; and that from all these sources, by a double distillation, his perfected essays were finally evolved.

Accordingly, many pages are here omitted which are to be found in his published works, but a great wealth of matter remains—chips from his workshop—which will be new to the reader. And as he always composed carefully, even when writing only for his own eye, and as consecutiveness was never his long suit, these entries may be read with a pleasure and profit hardly less than are given by his finished writings.

The editors, with excellent discretion, have sometimes allowed to stand the first outlines, in prose or verse, of work long fa-

**Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1820-76.* Edited by E. W. Emerson and Waldo E. Forbes. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1909-14.

miliar in its completed shape. Here, for instance, is the germ of a favorite poem:

"August 28. [1838.]

"It is very grateful to my feelings to go into a Roman cathedral, yet I look as my countrymen do at the Roman priesthood. It is very grateful to me to go into an English church and hear the liturgy read. Yet nothing would induce me to be the English priest. I find an unpleasant dilemma in this nearer home."

This dilemma is "The Problem." And here again is the original of "The Two Rivers," "as it came to mind, sitting by the river, one April day" (April 5, 1856):

"Thy Voice is sweet, Musketaquid; repeats the music of the rain; but sweeter rivers silent flit through thee, as thou through Concord plain.

"Thou art shut in thy banks; but the stream I love, flows in thy water, and flows through rocks and through the air, and through darkness, and through men, and women. I hear and see the inundation and eternal spending of the stream, in winter and in summer, in men and animals, in passion and thought. Happy are they who can hear it.

"I see thy brimming, eddying stream, and

thy enchantment. For thou changest every rock in thy bed into a gem; all is real opal and agate, and at will thou pavest with diamonds. Take them away from thy stream, and they are poor shards and flints: So is it with me to-day."

These journals differ from common diaries in being a chronicle of thoughts, rather than of events, or even of impressions. Emerson is the most impersonal of writers, which accounts in part, and by virtue of the attraction of opposites, for the high regard in which he held that gossip, Montaigne. Still, there are jottings enough of foreign travel, lecture tours, domestic incidents, passing public events, club meetings, college reunions, walks and talks with Concord neighbors, and the like, to afford the material of a new biography,* which has been published uniformly with the ten volumes of journals. And the philosopher held himself so aloof from vulgar curiosity that the general reader, who breathes with difficulty in the rarefied air of high speculations, will perhaps turn most readily to such more intimate items as occur. As where his little son—the "deep-eyed boy" of the "Threnody"—being taken to the circus, said *à propos* of the clown,

**Ralph Waldo Emerson.* By O. W. Firkins. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915.

"Papa, the funny man makes me want to go home." Emerson adds that he and Waldo were of one mind on the subject; and one thereupon recalls a celebrated incident in the career of Mark Twain. The diarist is not above setting down jests—even profane jests —with occasional anecdotes, *bons mots*, and miscellaneous witticisms like "an ordinary man or a Christian." I, for one, would like to know who was the "Miss ——— of New Haven, who on reading Ruskin's book [presumably "Modern Painters"], said 'Nature was Mrs. Turner.'" Were there such witty fair in the New Haven of 1848?

In the privacy of his journals, every man allows himself a license of criticism which he would hardly practise in public. The limitations or eccentricities of Emerson's literary tastes are familiar to most; such as his dislike of Shelley and contempt for Poe, "the jingle man." But here is a judgment, calmly penned, which rather takes one's breath away: "Nathaniel Hawthorne's reputation as a writer is a very pleasing fact, because his writing is not good for anything, and this is a tribute to the man." This, to be sure, was in 1842, eight years before the appearance of "The Scarlet Letter." Yet, to the last, the romancer's obsession with the problem of evil affected the resolved optimist as unwholesome. Indeed he speaks impatiently of all

novels, and prophesies that they will give way by and by to autobiographies and diaries. The only exception to his general distaste for fiction is "The Bride of Lammermoor," which he mentions repeatedly and with high praise, comparing it with Aeschylus.

The entry concerning Moore's "Life of Sheridan" is surprisingly savage—less like the gentle Emerson than like his truculent friend Carlyle: "He details the life of a mean, fraudulent, vain, quarrelsome play-actor, whose wit lay in cheating tradesmen, whose genius was used in studying jokes and *bons mots* at home for a dinner or a club, who laid traps for the admiration of coxcombs, who never did anything good and never said anything wise."

Emerson's biographers make a large claim for him. One calls him "the first of American thinkers": another, "the only great mind in American literature." This is a generous challenge, but I believe that, with proper definition, it may be granted. When it is remembered that among American thinkers are Jonathan Edwards, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, William James, and Willard Gibbs, one hesitates to subscribe to so absolute a verdict. Let it stand true, however, with the saving clause, "after the intuitional order of thought." Emerson

dwelt with the insights of the Reason and not with the logically derived judgments of the Understanding. (He capitalizes the names of these faculties, which translate the Kantian *Vernunft* and *Verstand*.) Dialectics he eschewed, professing himself helpless to conduct an argument. He announced truths, but would not undertake to say by what process of reasoning he reached them. They were not the conclusions of a syllogism: they were borne in upon him—revelations. At New Bedford he visited the meetings of the Quakers, and took great interest in their doctrine of the inner light.

When the heresies of the "Divinity School Address" (1838) were attacked by orthodox Unitarians (if there is such a thing as an orthodox Unitarian) like Andrews Norton in "The Latest Form of Infidelity," and Henry Ware in his sermon on "The Personality of God," Emerson made no attempt to defend his position. In a cordial letter to Ware he wrote: "I could not possibly give you one of the 'arguments' you cruelly hint at, on which any doctrine of mine stands; for I do not know what arguments are in reference to any expression of a thought. I delight in telling what I think; but if you ask me how I dare say so, or why it is so, I am the most helpless of mortal men."

Let me add a few sentences from the noble

and beautiful passage written at sea, September 17, 1833: "Yesterday I was asked what I mean by morals. I reply that I cannot define, and care not to define. . . . That which I cannot yet declare has been my angel from childhood until now. . . . It cannot be defeated by my defeats. It cannot be questioned though all the martyrs apostatize. . . . What is this they say about wanting mathematical certainty for moral truths? I have always affirmed they had it. Yet they ask me whether I know the soul immortal. No. But do I not know the Now to be eternal? . . . Men seem to be constitutionally believers and unbelievers. There is no bridge that can cross from a mind in one state to a mind in the other. All my opinions, affections, whimsies, are tinged with belief,—incline to that side. . . . But I cannot give reasons to a person of a different persuasion that are at all adequate to the force of my conviction. Yet when I fail to find the reason, my faith is not less."

No doubt most men cherish deep beliefs for which they can assign no reasons: "real assents," rather than "notional assents," in Newman's phrase. But Emerson's profession of inability to argue need not be accepted too literally. It is a mask of humility covering a subtle policy: a plea in confession and avoidance: a throwing off of responsibility *in*

forma pauperis. He could argue well, when he wanted to. In these journals, for example, he exposes, with admirable shrewdness, the unreasonableness and inconsistency of Alcott, Thoreau, and others, who refused to pay taxes because Massachusetts enforced the fugitive slave law: "As long as the state means you well, do not refuse your pistareen. You have a tottering cause: ninety parts of the pistareen it will spend for what you think also good: ten parts for mischief. You cannot fight heartily for a fraction. . . . The state tax does not pay the Mexican War. Your coat, your sugar, your Latin and French and German book, your watch does. Yet these you do not stick at buying."

Again, is it true that Emerson is the only great mind in American literature? Of his greatness of mind there can be no question; but how far was that mind *in* literature? No one doubts that Poe, or Hawthorne, or Longfellow, or Irving was *in* literature: was, above all things else, a man of letters. But the gravamen of Emerson's writing appears to many to fall outside of the domain of letters: to lie in the provinces of ethics, religion, and speculative thought. They acknowledge that his writings have wonderful force and beauty, have literary quality; but tried by his subject matter, he is more a philosopher, a moralist, a theosophist, than a poet or a man

of letters who deals with this human life as he finds it. A theosophist, not of course a theologian. Emerson is the most religious of thinkers, but by 1836, when his first book, "Nature," was published, he had thought himself free of dogma and creed. Not the least interest of the journals is in the evidence they give of the process, the steps of growth by which he won to his perfected system. As early as 1824 we find a letter to Plato, remarkable in its mature gravity for a youth of twenty-one, questioning the exclusive claim of the Christian Revelation: "Of this Revelation I am the ardent friend. Of the Being who sent it I am the child. . . . But I confess it has not for me the same exclusive and extraordinary claims it has for many. I hold Reason to be a prior Revelation. . . . I need not inform you in all its depraved details of the theology under whose chains Calvin of Geneva bound Europe down; but this opinion, that the Revelation had become necessary to the salvation of men through some conjunction of events in heaven, is one of its vagaries."

Emerson refused to affirm personality of God, "because it is too little, not too much." Here, for instance, in the journal for Sunday, May 22, 1836, is the seed of the passage in the "Divinity School Address" which complains that "historical Christianity . . .

dwells with noxious exaggeration about the *person* of Jesus": "The talk of the kitchen and the cottage is exclusively occupied with persons. . . . And yet, when cultivated men speak of God, they demand a biography of him as steadily as the kitchen and the bar-room demand personalities of men. . . . Theism must be, and the name of God must be, because it is a necessity of the human mind to apprehend the relative as flowing from the absolute, and we shall always give the absolute a name."

The theosophist whose soul is in direct contact with the "Oversoul" needs no "evidences of Christianity," nor any revelation through the scripture or the written word. Revelation is to him something more immediate—a doctrine, said Andrews Norton, which is not merely a heresy, but is not even an intelligible error. Neither does the mystic seek proof of God's existence from the arguments of natural theology. "The intellectual power is not the gift, but the presence of God. Nor do we reason to the being of God, but God goes with us into Nature, when we go or think at all."

The popular faith does not warm to Emerson's impersonal deity. "I cannot love or worship an abstraction," it says. "I must have a Father to believe in and pray to: a Father who loves and watches over *me*. As

for the immortality you offer, it has no promise for the heart.

> My servant Death, with solving rite,
> Pours finite into infinite.

I do not know what it means to be absorbed into the absolute. The loss of conscious personal life is the loss of all. To awake into another state of being without a memory of this, is such a loss; and is, besides, inconceivable. I want to be re-united to my friends. I want my heaven to be a continuation of my earth. And hang Brahma!"

In literature, as in religion, this impersonality has disconcerting aspects to the man who dwells in the world of the senses and the understanding. "Some men," says a note of 1844, "have the perception of difference predominant, and are conversant with surfaces and trifles, with coats and coaches and faces and cities; these are the men of talent. And other men abide by the perception of Identity: these are the Orientals, the philosophers, the men of faith and divinity, the men of genius."

All this has a familiar look to readers who remember the chapter on Plato in "Representative Men," or passages like the following from "The Oversoul": "In youth we are mad for persons. But the larger experience of man discovers the identical nature appear-

ing through them all." Now, in mundane letters it is the difference that counts, the *più* and not the *uno*. The common nature may be taken for granted. In drama and fiction, particularly, difference is life and identity is death; and this "tyrannizing unity" would cut the ground from under them both.

This philosophical attitude did not keep Emerson from having a sharp eye for personal traits. His sketch of Thoreau in "Excursions" is a masterpiece; and so is the half-humorous portrait of Socrates in "Representative Men"; and both these are matched by the keen analysis of Daniel Webster in the journals. All going to show that this transcendentalist had something of "the devouring eye and the portraying hand" with which he credits Carlyle.

As in religion and in literature, so in the common human relations, this impersonality gives a peculiar twist to Emerson's thought. The coldness of his essays on "Love" and "Friendship" has been often pointed out. His love is the high Platonic love. He is enamored of perfection, and individual men and women are only broken images of the absolute good.

> Have I a lover who is noble and free?
> I would he were nobler than to love me.

Alas! *nous autres*, we do not love our friends

because they are more or less perfect reflections of divinity. We love them in spite of their faults: almost because of their faults: at least we love their faults because they are theirs. "You are in love with certain attributes," said the fair blue-stocking in "Hyperion" to her suitor. "'Madam,' said I, 'damn your attributes!'"

Another puzzle in Emerson, to the general reader, is the centrality of his thought. I remember a remark of Professor Thomas A. Thacher, upon hearing an address of W. T. Harris, the distinguished Hegelian and educationalist. He said that Mr. Harris went a long way back for a jump. So Emerson draws lines of relation from every least thing to the centre.

> A subtle chain of countless rings
> The next unto the farthest brings.

He never lets go his hold upon his theosophy. All his wagons are hitched to stars: himself from God he cannot free. But the citizen does not like to be always reminded of God, as he goes about his daily affairs. It carries a disturbing suggestion of death and the judgment and eternity and the other world. But, for the present, this comfortable phenomenal world of time and space is good enough for him. "So a' cried out, 'God, God, God!' three or four times. Now I, to comfort him, bid

him a' should not think of God; I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet."

Another block of stumbling, about which much has been written, is Emerson's optimism, which rests upon the belief that evil is negative, merely the privation or shadow of good, without real existence. It was the heresy of "Uriel" that there was nothing inherently and permanently bad: no line of division between good and evil—"Line in nature is not found"; "Evil will bless and ice will burn." He turned away resolutely from the contemplation of sin, crime, suffering: was impatient of complaints of sickness, of breakfast-table talk about headaches and a bad night's sleep. Doubtless had he lived to witness the Christian Science movement, he would have taken an interest in the underlying doctrine, while repelled by the element of quackery in the practice and preaching of the sect. Hence the tragedy of life is ignored or evaded by Emerson. But *ici bas*, the reality of evil is not abolished, as an experience, by calling it the privation of good; nor will philosophy cure the grief of a wound. We suffer quite as acutely as we enjoy. We find that all those disagreeable appearances—"swine, spiders, snakes, pests, mad-houses, prisons, enemies,"—which he assures us will disappear, when man comes fully into pos-

session of his kingdom, do not disappear but persist.

The dispute between optimism and pessimism rests, in the long run, on individual temperament and personal experience, and admits of no secure solution. Imposing systems of philosophy have been erected on these opposing views. Leibnitz proved that everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. Schopenhauer demonstrated the futility of the will to live; and showed that he who increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. Nor does it avail to appeal from the philosophers to the poets, as more truly expressing the general sense of mankind; and to array Byron, Leopardi, Shelley, and the book of "Lamentations," and "The City of Dreadful Night" against Goethe, Wordsworth, Browning, and others of the hopeful wise. The question cannot be decided by a majority vote: the question whether life is worth living, is turned aside by a jest about the liver. Meanwhile men give it practically an affirmative answer by continuing to live. Is life so bad? Then why not all commit suicide? Dryden explains, in a famous tirade, that we do not kill ourselves because we are the fools of hope:—

> When I consider life, 'tis all a cheat . . .

Shelley, we are reminded, calls birth an

"eclipsing curse"; and Byron, in a hackneyed stanza, invites us to count over the joys our life has seen and our days free from anguish, and to recognize that whatever we have been, it were better not to be at all.

The question as between optimist and pessimist is not whether evil is a necessary foil to good, as darkness is to light—a discipline without which we could have no notion of good,—but whether or not evil predominates in the universe. Browning, who seems to have had somewhat of a contempt for Bryon, affirms:—

> . . . There 's a simple test
> Would serve, when people take on them to weigh
> The worth of poets. "Who was better, best,
> This, that, the other bard?" . . .
> End the strife
> By asking "Which one led a happy life?"

This may answer as a criterion of a poet's "worth," that is, his power to fortify, to heal, to inspire; but it can hardly be accepted, without qualification, as a test of intellectual power. Goethe, to be sure, thought lightly of Byron as a thinker. But Leopardi was a thinker and a deep and exact scholar. And what of Shakespeare? What of the speeches in his plays which convey a profound conviction of the overbalance of misery

in human life?—Hamlet's soliloquy; Macbeth's "Out, out, brief candle"; the Duke's remonstrance with Claudio in "Measure for Measure," persuading him that there was nothing in life which he need regret to lose; and the sad reflections of the King in "All's Well that Ends Well" upon the approach of age,

> Let me not live after my flame lacks oil.

It is the habit of present-day criticism to regard all such speeches in Shakespeare as having a merely dramatic character, true only to the feeling of the *dramatis persona* who speaks them. It may be so; but often there is a weight of thought and emotion in these and the like passages which breaks through the platform of the theatre and gives us the truth as Shakespeare himself sees it.

Browning's admirers accord him great credit for being happy. And, indeed, he seems to take credit to himself for that same. Now we may envy a man for being happy, but we can hardly praise him for it. It is not a thing that depends on his will, but is only his good fortune. Let it be admitted that those writers do us the greater service who emphasize the hopeful view, who are lucky enough to be able to maintain that view. Still, when we consider what this world is,

the placid optimism of Emerson and the robustious optimism of Browning become sometimes irritating; and we feel almost like calling for a new "Candide" and exclaim impatiently, *Il faut cultiver notre jardin!*

> Grow old along with me,
> The best is yet to be.

Oh, no: the best has been: youth is the best. So answers general, if not universal, experience. Old age doubtless has its compensations, and Cicero has summed them up ingeniously. But the "De Senectute" is, at best, a whistling to keep up one's courage.

> Strange cozenage! None would live past years again,
> Yet all hope pleasure from what still remain,
> And from the dregs of life hope to receive
> What the first sprightly runnings could not give.
> I'm tired of waiting for this chymic gold,
> Which fools us young and beggars us when old.

Upon the whole, Matthew Arnold holds the balance more evenly than either optimist or pessimist.

> . . . Life still
> Yields human effort scope.
> But since life teems with ill,
> Nurse no extravagant hope.
> Because thou must not dream,
> Thou needs't not then despair.

Spite of all impersonality, there is much interesting personal mention in these journals. Emerson's kindly regard for his Concord friends and neighbors is quite charming. He had need of much patience with some of them, for they were queer as Dick's proverbial hatband: transcendentalists, reformers, vegetarians, communists—the "cranks" of our contemporary slang. The figure which occurs oftenest in these memoranda is—naturally—Mr. A. Bronson Alcott. Of him Emerson speaks with unfailing reverence, mingled with a kind of tender desperation over his unworldliness and practical helplessness. A child of genius, a deep-thoughted seer, a pure visionary, living, as nearly as such a thing is possible, the life of a disembodied spirit. If earth were heaven, Alcott's life would have been the right life. "Great Looker! Great Expecter!" says Thoreau. "His words and attitude always suppose a better state of things than other men are acquainted with. . . . He has no venture in the present."

Emerson is forced to allow that Alcott was no writer: talk was his medium. And even from his talk one derived few definite ideas; but its steady, melodious flow induced a kind of hypnotic condition, in which one's own mind worked with unusual energy, without much attending to what was being

said. "Alcott is like a slate-pencil which has a sponge tied to the other end, and, as the point of the pencil draws lines, the sponge follows as fast, and erases them. He talks high and wide, and expresses himself very happily, and forgets all he has said. If a skilful operator could introduce a lancet and sever the sponge, Alcott would be the prince of writers." "I used to tell him that he had no senses. . . . We had a good proof of it this morning. He wanted to know 'why the boys waded in the water after pond lilies?' Why, because they will sell in town for a cent apiece and every man and child likes to carry one to church for a cologne bottle. 'What!' said he, 'have they a perfume? I did not know it.' "

And Ellery Channing, who had in him brave, translunary things, as Hawthorne testifies no less than Emerson; as his own poems do partly testify—those poems which were so savagely cut up by Edgar Poe. Channing, too, was no writer, no artist. His poetry was freakish, wilfully imperfect, not seldom affected, sometimes downright silly—"shamefully indolent and slovenly," are Emerson's words concerning it.

Margaret Fuller, too, fervid, high aspiring, dominating soul, and brilliant talker: ("such a determination to *eat* this huge universe," Carlyle's comment upon her; dis-

agreeable, conceited woman, Lowell's and Hawthorne's verdict). Margaret, too, was an "illuminator but no writer." Miss Peabody was proposing to collect anecdotes of Margaret's youth. But Emerson throws cold water on the project: "Now, unhappily, Margaret's writing does not justify any such research. All that can be said is that she represents an interesting hour and group in American cultivation; then that she was herself a fine, generous, inspiring, vinous, eloquent talker, who did not outlive her influence."

This is sound criticism. None of these people could write. Thoreau and Hawthorne and Emerson, himself, were accomplished writers, and are American classics. But the collected works of Margaret Fuller, in the six-volume "Tribune Memorial Edition" are disappointing. They do not interest, are to-day virtually unreadable. A few of Channing's most happily inspired and least capriciously expressed verses find lodgment in the anthologies. As for Alcott, he had no technique at all. For its local interest I once read his poem "New Connecticut," which recounts his early life in the little old hilltop village of Wolcott (Alcott of Wolcott), and as a Yankee pedlar in the South. It is of a winning innocence, a more than Wordsworthian simplicity. I read it with pleasure,

as the revelation of a singularly pure and disinterested character. As a literary composition, it is about on the level of Mother Goose. Here is one more extract from the journals, germane to the matter:

"In July [1852] Mr. Alcott went to Connecticut to his native town of Wolcott; found his father's farm in possession of a stranger; found many of his cousins still poor farmers in the town; the town itself unchanged since his childhood, whilst all the country round has been changed by manufactures and railroads. Wolcott, which is a mountain, remains as it was, or with a still less population (ten thousand dollars, he said, would buy the whole town, and all the men in it) and now tributary entirely to the neighboring town of Waterbury, which is a thriving factory village. Alcott went about and invited all the people, his relatives and friends, to meet him at five o'clock at the schoolhouse, where he had once learned, on Sunday evening. Thither they all came, and he sat at the desk and gave them the story of his life. Some of the audience went away discontented, because they had not heard a sermon, as they hoped."

Some sixty years after this entry was made, I undertook a literary pilgrimage to Wolcott in company with a friend. We crossed the mountain from Plantsville and,

on the outskirts of the village, took dinner at a farmhouse, one wing of which was the little Episcopal chapel in which the Alcott family had worshipped about 1815. It had been moved over, I believe, from the centre. The centre itself was a small green, bordered by some dozen houses, with the meeting-house and horse sheds, on an airy summit overlooking a vast open prospect of farms and woods, falling away to the Naugatuck. We inquired at several of the houses, and of the few human beings met on the road, where was the birthplace of A. Bronson Alcott? In vain: none had ever heard of him, nor of an Alcott family once resident in the town: not even of Louisa Alcott, whose "Little Women" still sells its annual thousands, and a dramatized version of which was even then playing in New York to crowded houses. The prophet and his country! We finally heard rumors of a certain Spindle Hill, which was vaguely connected with traditions of the Alcott name. But it was getting late, and we availed ourselves of a passing motor car which set us some miles on our way towards the Waterbury trolley line. This baffled act of homage has seemed to me, in a way, symbolical, and I have never renewed it.

It was Emerson's belief that the faintest promptings of the spirit are also, in the end, the practical rules of conduct. A paragraph

written in 1837 has a startling application to the present state of affairs in Europe: "I think the principles of the Peace party sublime. . . . If a nation of men is exalted to that height of morals as to refuse to fight and choose rather to suffer loss of goods and loss of life than to use violence, they must be not helpless, but most effective and great men: they would overawe their invader and make him ridiculous: they would communicate the contagion of their virtue and inoculate all mankind."

Is this transcendental politics? Does it belong to what Mr. Roosevelt calls, with apt alliteration, the "realm of shams and shadows"? It is, at all events, applied Christianity. It is the principle of the Society of Friends; and of Count Tolstoy, who of all recent great writers is the most consistent preacher of Christ's gospel.

THE ART OF LETTER WRITING

THIS lecture was founded by Mr. George F. Dominick, of the Class of 1894, in memory of Daniel S. Lamont, private secretary to President Cleveland, and afterwards Secretary of War, during Mr. Cleveland's second term of office. Mr. Dominick had a high regard for Lamont's skill as a letter writer and in the composition of messages, despatches, and reports. It was his wish, not only to perpetuate the memory of his friend and to associate it with his own Alma Mater, but to give his memorial a shape which should mark his sense of the importance of the art of letter writing.

Mr. Dominick thought that Lamont was particularly happy in turning a phrase and that many of the expressions which passed current in Cleveland's two presidencies were really of his secretary's coinage. I don't suppose that we are to transfer such locutions as "innocuous desuetude" and "pernicious activity" from the President to his secretary. They bear the stamp of their authorship. I fancy that Mr. Lamont's good phrases took less room to turn in.

But however this may be, the founder of this lecture is certainly right in his regard for the art of letter writing. It is an important asset in any man's equipment, and I have heard it said that the test of education is the ability to write a good letter. Merchants, manufacturers, and business men generally, in advertising for clerks or assistants, are apt to judge of the fitness of applicants for positions by the kind of letters that they write. If these are illegible, ill-spelled, badly punctuated and paragraphed, ungrammatical, confused, repetitious, ignorantly or illiterately expressed, they are usually fatal to their writers' hopes of a place. This is not quite fair, for there is many a shrewd man of business who can't write a good letter. But surely a college graduate may be justly expected to write correct English; and he is likely to be more often called on to use it in letters than in any other form of written composition. "The writing of letters," says John Locke, "has so much to do in all the occurrences of human life, that no gentleman can avoid showing himself in this kind of writing . . . which always lays him open to a severer examination of his breeding, sense and abilities than oral discourses whose transient faults . . . more easily escape observation and censure." *Litera scripta manet.* Who was the prudent

lâdy in one of Rhoda Broughton's novels who cautioned her friend: "My dear, never write a letter; there's not a scrap of my handwriting in Europe"? Rightly or wrongly, we are quick to draw conclusions as to a person's social antecedents from his pronunciation and from his letters.

In the familiar epistle, as in other forms of social intercourse, nothing can quite take the place of old use and wont. Still the proper forms may be learned from the rhetoric books, just as the young man whose education has been neglected may learn from the standard manuals of politeness, such as "Etiquette and Eloquence or The Perfect Gentleman," what the right hour is for making an evening call, and on what occasions the Tuxedo jacket is the correct thing. The rhetorics give directions how to address a letter, to begin it, to close it, and where to put the postage stamp; directions as to the date, the salutation, the signature, and cautions not to write "yours respectively" instead of "yours respectfully." These are useful, but beyond these the rhetoric books cannot go, save in the way of general advice. The model letters in "The Complete Letter Writer" are dismal things. "Ideas," says one of these textbook authorities, "ideas should be collected by the card system." Now I rather think that ideas should *not* be col-

lected by the card system, or by any other system. The charm of a personal letter is its spontaneity. Any suspicion that the ideas in it have been "collected" is deadly. To do the rhetoric books justice, the best of them warn against formality in all except the necessarily formal portions of the letter. A letter, like an epic poem, should begin *in medias res*. Ancient targets for jest are the opening formulae in servant girls' correspondence. "I take my pen in hand to inform you that I am well and hope you are enjoying the same great blessing;" or the sentence with which our childish communications used to start out: "Dear Champ,—As I have nothing else to do I thought I would write you a letter"—matter of excusation and apology which Bacon instructs us to avoid.

The little boy whom Dr. John Brown tells about was unconsciously obeying Aristotle's rule. Without permission he had taken his brother's gun and broken it; and after hiding himself all day, he opened written communications with his stern elder; a blotted and tear-spotted scrawl beginning: "O Jamie, your gun is broke and my heart is broke."

But no general rules for letter writing give much help; nor for that matter, do general rules for any kind of writing. A little practice in the concrete, under intelligent guidance, is worth any number of rhetorical

platitudes. But such as it is, the rule for a business letter is just the reverse of that for a friendly letter. It should be as brief as is consistent with clearness, for your correspondent is a business man, whose time is his money. It should above all things, however, be explicit; and in striving to avoid surplusage should omit nothing that is necessary. Ambiguity is here the unpardonable sin and has occasioned thousands of law suits, involving millions of dollars. It should be severely impersonal. Pleasantries, sentiments, digressions and the like are impertinences in a business letter, like the familiarity of an unintroduced stranger. I knew a lawyer—and a good lawyer—who suffered professionally, because he would get himself into his business letters. He made jokes; he made quotations; sometimes French quotations which his correspondents could not translate; he expressed opinions and vented emotions on subjects only incidentally connected with the matter in hand, which he embroidered with wit and fancy; and he was a long time coming to the point. Now men of business may trifle about all other serious aspects of life or death, but when it concerns the making of money, they are in deadly earnest; so that my friend's frivolous treatment of those interests seemed to them little less than sacrilege.

Viewed then as one of the commonest

means of communication between man and man, it is well to be able to write a good letter; just as it is well to know how to tie a bowknot, cast an account, carve a joint, shave oneself, or meet any other of the ordinary occasions of life. But tons of letters are emptied from the mail bags every day, and burned, which serve no other than a momentary end. The art of composing letters worth keeping and printing is a part of the art literary. The word letters and the word literature are indeed used interchangeably; we speak of a man of letters, polite letters, the *belles lettres*, *literae humaniores*. How far are such expressions justified? Manifestly a letter, or a collection of letters, has not the structural unity and the deliberate artistic appeal of the higher forms of literature. It is not like an epic poem, a play, a novel or an ode. It has an art of its own, but an art of a particular kind, the secret of which is artlessness. It is not addressed to the public but to an individual and should betray no consciousness of any third party. It belongs, therefore, in the class with journals and table talk and, above all, autobiography, of which it constitutes the very best material. A book is written for everybody, a diary for oneself, a letter for one's friend. While a letter, therefore, cannot quite claim a standing among the works of the

creative imagination, yet it comes so freshly out of life and is so true in self-expression that, in some moods, we prefer it to more artificial or more objective kinds of literature; just as the advertisements in an old newspaper or magazine often have a greater veracity and freshness as dealing with the homely, actual needs and concerns of the time, than the stories, poems, and editorials whose fashion has faded.

I am speaking now of a genuine letter, "a link between two personalities," as it has been defined. There are two varieties of letters which are not genuine. The first of these is the open letter, the letter to the editor, letter to a noble lord, etc. This is really addressed to the public through the medium of a more or less imaginary correspondent. The Englishman's habit of writing to the *London Times* on all occasions is proverbial. Professor Goldwin Smith is a living example of the practice, transplanted to the field of the American newspaper press. But *private* letters written with an eye to publication are spoiled in the act. To be natural they should not mean to be overheard. If afterwards, by reason of the eminence of the writer, or of some quality in the letters themselves, they get into print, let it be by accident and not from forethought. Why is it, then, that the best printed letters, such as Gray's, Wal-

pole's, Cowper's, Fitzgerald's, written with all the ease and intimacy of confidential intercourse—"written *from* one man and *to* one man"—are found to be composed in such perfect English, with such high finish, filled with matter usually reserved by professional authors for their essays or descriptive sketches; in fine, to be so literary? The reason I take to be partly in the mutual intellectual sympathy between writer and correspondent; and partly in the conscientious literary habit of the letter writer. Hawthorne's "Note Books," intended only for his own eye, are written with almost as much care as the romances and tales into which many pages of them were decanted with little alteration.

Besides the open letter, there is another variety which is not a real letter: I mean the letter of fiction. This has been a favorite method of telling a story. You know that all the novels of our first novelist, Richardson, are in this form: "Pamela," "Clarissa Harlowe," "Sir Charles Grandison"; and some of the most successful American short stories of recent years have been written in letters: Mr. James's "A Bundle of Letters," Mr. Aldrich's "Margery Daw," Mr. Bishop's "Writing to Rosina" and many others. This is a subjective method of narration and requires a delicate art in differentiating the epistolary

style of a number of correspondents; though not more, perhaps, than in the management of dialogue in an ordinary novel or play. The plan has certain advantages and in Richardson's case was perhaps the most effective that he could have hit upon, i.e., the best adapted to the turn of his genius and the nature of his fiction. (Richardson began by writing letters for young people.) Fitzgerald, the translator of Omar Khayyám, and himself one of our best letter writers, preferred Richardson to Fielding, as did also Dr. Johnson. For myself, I will acknowledge that, while I enjoy a characteristic *introduced* letter here and there in a novel, as Thackeray, e.g., manages the thing; or even a short story in this form; yet a long novel written throughout in letters I find tedious, and Richardson's interminable fictions, in particular, perfectly unendurable.

The epistolary form is conveniently elastic and not only lends itself easily to the purposes of fiction, but is a ready vehicle of reflection, humor, sentiment, satire, and description. Such recent examples as "The Upton Letters," "The Love Letters of a Worldly Woman," and Andrew Lang's "Letters to Dead Authors" are illustrations, holding in solution many of the elements of the essay, the diary, the character sketch, and the parody.

But from these fictitious uses of the form let us return to the consideration of the real letter, the letter written by one man to another for his private perusal, but which from some superiority to the temporary occasion, has become literature. The theory of letter writing has been well given by Mr. J. C. Bailey in his "Studies in Some Famous Letters." "What is a letter? It is written talk, with something, but not all, of the easiness of talking; and something, but not all, of the formality of writing. It is at once spontaneous and deliberate, a thing of art and a thing of amusement, the idle occupation of an hour and the sure index of a character."

It is often said that letter writing is a lost art. It is an art of leisure and these are proverbially the days of hurry. The modern spirit is expressed by the telegraphic despatch, the telephone message, and the picture postal card. It is much if we manage an answer to an R.S.V.P. note of invitation. We have lost the habit of those old-fashioned correspondents whose "friendship covered reams." How wonderful now seem the voluminous outpourings of Mme. de Sevigné to her daughter! How did she get time to do it all? It has been shown by actual calculation that the time occupied by Clarissa Harlowe in writing her letters would have left no room

for the happening of the events which her letters record. She could not have been doing and suffering what she did and suffered and yet have had the leisure to write it up. And not only want of time, but an increasing reticence constrains our pens within narrower limits. Members of families now exchange letters merely to give news, ask questions, keep in touch with one another: not to confide feelings or impart experiences. A man is ashamed to sit down and deliberately pour out thoughts, sentiments, and descriptions, even to his intimates. "I suppose," wrote Fitzgerald, "that people who are engaged in serious ways of life, and are of well filled minds, don't think much about the interchange of letters with any anxiety; but I am an idle fellow, of a very ladylike turn of sentiment, and my friendships are more like loves, I think." It is from men of letters that the best letters are to be expected, but they are busy magazining, overwork their pens for the public, and are consequently impatient of the burden of private correspondence. "Private letters," wrote Willis to Poe, "are the last ounce that breaks the camel's back of a literary man." To ask him to write a letter after his day's work, said Willis, was like asking a penny postman to take a walk in the evening for the pleasure of it. And in a letter to a friend he excused his brevity on

the plea that he was paid a guinea a page for everything he wrote, and could not afford to waste manuscript. "I do not write letters to anybody," wrote Lowell in 1842 to his friend Dr. G. B. Loring. "The longer I live the more irksome does letter writing become to me. When we are young we need such a vent for our feelings. . . . But as we grow older and find more ease of expression, especially if it be in a way by which we can reach the general ear and heart, these private utterances become less and less needful to us." In spite of this protest, when Mr. Charles Eliot Norton came to print Lowell's letters, he found enough of them to fill two volumes of four hundred pages each. For after all, and with some exceptions, it is among the class of professional writers that we find the best letter writers: Gray, Cowper, Byron, Lamb, Fitzgerald, Lowell himself. They do it out of hours, "on the side" and, as in Lowell's case, under protest; but the habit of literary expression is strong in them; they like to practise their pens; they begin a note to a friend and before they know it they have made a piece of literature, bound some day to get into print with others of the same kind.

And here comes a curious speculation. Where do all the letters come from that go into these collections? Do you keep the letters that you receive? I confess that I

burn most of mine as soon as I have read them. Still more, do you keep copies of the letters that you send? I don't mean typewritten business letters which you put damp into the patent-press-letter-copier to take off an impression to file away for reference, but friendly letters? The typewriting machine, by the way, is perhaps partly responsible for the decay of the letter writing art. It is hard to imagine Charles Lamb, or any other master of this most personal and intimate little art, who would not be disconcerted by this mechanical interposition between his thought and his page. The last generation must certainly have hoarded their letters more carefully than ours. You come across trunks full of them, desks full of them in the garrets of old houses: yellow bundles tied with tape, faded ink, stains of pressed violets, dust and musty odors, old mirth, old sorrows, old loves. Hackneyed themes of pathos, I mention them again, not to drop the tear of sensibility on their already well-moistened paper, but to enquire: Are these, and such as these, the sources of those many printed volumes "Letters of Blank," "Diary and Correspondence of So and So," ranging in date over periods of fifty or sixty years, and beginning sometimes in the boyhood of the writer, when the correspondent who preserved the letter could not possibly have

foreseen Blank's future greatness and the value of his autograph?

Women are proverbially good letter writers. The letters of Mme. de Sevigné to her daughter are masterpieces of their kind. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's are among the best of English letters; and Fitzgerald somewhat whimsically mentions the correspondence of a certain Mrs. French as worthy to rank with Horace Walpole's. "Would you desire at this day," says De Quincey, "to read our noble language in its native beauty . . . steal the mail bags and break open all the letters in female handwriting. Three out of four will have been written by that class of women who have the most leisure and the most interest in a correspondence by the post," i.e., "unmarried women above twenty-five." De Quincey adds that "if required to come forward in some public character" these same ladies "might write ill and affectedly. . . . But in their letters they write under the benefit of their natural advantages . . . sustained by some deep sympathy between themselves and their correspondents." "Authors can't write letters," says Lowell in a letter to Miss Norton. "At best they squeeze out an essay now and then, burying every natural sprout in a dry and dreary *sand flood*, as unlike as possible to those delightful freshets with which your heart

overflows the paper. *They* are thinking of their punctuation, of crossing their t's and dotting their i's, and cannot forget themselves in their correspondent, which I take to be the true recipe for a letter." And writing to another correspondent, C. E. Norton, he says: "The habits of authorship are fatal to the careless unconsciousness that is the life of a letter. . . . But worse than all is that lack of interest in one's self that comes of drudgery—for I hold that a letter which is not mainly about the writer of it lacks the prime flavor." This is slightly paradoxical, for, I repeat, the best published letters are commonly the work of professional *literati.* Byron's letters have been preferred by some readers to his poetry, such are their headlong vigor, dash, *verve,* spontaneity, the completeness of their self-expression. Keats was *par excellence* the literary artist; yet nothing can exceed the artlessness, simplicity, and sympathetic self-forgetfulness with which he writes to his little sister. But it is easy to see what Lowell means. Charles Lamb's letters, e.g., though in many respects charming, are a trifle too *composed.* They have that trick of quaintness which runs through the "Essays of Elia," but which gives an air of artificiality to a private letter. He is practising a literary habit rather than thinking of his correspondent.

In this most intimate, personal, and mutual of arts, the writer should write *to* his friend what will interest him as well as himself. He should not dwell on hobbies of his own; nor describe his own experiences at too great length. It is all right to amuse his friend, but not to air his own cleverness. Lowell's letters are delightful, and, by and large, I would place them second to none in the language. But they are sometimes too literary and have the faults of his prose writing in general. Wit was always his temptation, misleading him now and then into a kind of Yankee smartness and a disposition to show off. His temperament was buoyant, impulsive; there was to the last a good deal of the boy about Lowell. Letter writing is a friendly art, and Lowell's warm expressions of love for his friends are most genuine. His epistolary style, like his essay style, is lavish and seldom chastened or toned down to the exquisite simplicity which distinguishes the best letters of Gray and Cowper. And so Lowell is always getting in his own way, tripping himself up over his superabundance of matter. Still, as a whole, I know no collected letters richer in thought, humor, and sentiment. And one may trace in them, read consecutively, the gradual ripening and refining of a highly gifted mind and a nature which had at once nobility and charm of thought.

Lowell speaks admiringly of Emerson's "gracious impersonality." Now impersonality is the last thing we expect of a letter writer. Emerson could write a good letter on occasion, as may be seen by a dip almost anywhere into the Carlyle-Emerson correspondence. But when Mr. Cabot was preparing his life of Emerson and applied to Henry James, Senior, for permission to read his letters to Emerson, Mr. James replied, not without a touch of petulance: "Emerson always kept one at such arm's length, tasting him and sipping him and trying him, to make sure that he was worthy of his somewhat prim and bloodless friendship, that it was fatiguing to write him letters. I can't recall any serious letter I ever sent him. I remember well what maidenly letters I used to receive from him." We know what doctrine Emerson held on the subject of "persons." But it is just this personality which makes Lowell the prince of letter writers. He may attract, he may irritate, but he never fails to interest us in himself. Even in his books it is the man in the book that interests most.

Women write good letters because they are sympathetic; because they take personal rather than abstract views; because they stay at home a great deal and are interested in little things and fond of exchanging confidences and news. They like to receive letters

as well as to write them. The fact that Richardson found his most admiring readers among the ladies was due perhaps not only to the sentimentality of his novels, but to their epistolary form. Hence there is apt to be a touch of the feminine in the most accomplished letter writers. They are gossips, like Horace Walpole, or dilettanti like Edward Fitzgerald, or shy, reserved, sensitive persons like Gray and Cowper, who live apart, retired from the world in a retirement either cloistral or domestic; who have a few friends and a genius for friendship, enjoy the exercise of their pens, feel the need of unbosoming themselves, but are not ready talkers. Above all they are not above being interested in trifles and little things. Cowper was absorbed in his hares, his cucumber frames and gardening, country walks, tea-table chat, winding silk for Mrs. Unwin. Lamb was unceasingly taken up with the oddities and antiquities of London streets, the beggars, the chimney sweeps, the old benchers, the old bookstalls, and the like. Gray fills his correspondence with his solitary pursuits and recreations and tastes: Gothic curiosities, engravings, music sheets, ballads, excursions here and there. The familiar is of the essence of good letter writing: to unbend, to relax, to *desipere in loco*, to occupy at least momentarily the playful and humorous point of

view. Solemn, prophetic souls devoted to sublimity are not for this art. Dante and Milton and "old Daddy" Wordsworth, as Fitzgerald calls him, could never have been good letter writers: they were too great to care about little things, too high and rigid to stoop to trifles.

Letter writing is sometimes described as a colloquial art. Correspondence, it is said, is a conversation kept up between interlocutors at a distance. But there is a difference: good talkers are not necessarily good letter writers, and *vice versa*. Coleridge, e.g., was great in monologue, but his letters are in no way remarkable. Cowper, on the other hand, did not sparkle in conversation, and Gray was silent in company, "dull," Dr. Johnson called him. Johnson himself, notoriously a most accomplished talker, does not shine as a letter writer. His letters, frequently excellent in substance, are ponderous in style. They are of the kind best described as "epistolary correspondence." The Doctor needed the give and take of social intercourse to allay the heaviness of his written discourse. His talk was animated, pointed, idiomatic, but when he sat down and took pen in hand, he began to translate, as Macaulay said, from English into Johnsonese. His celebrated letter of rebuke to Lord Chesterfield labors under the weight of its indignation, is not

free from pomposity and pedantry, and is written with an eye to posterity. One can imagine the noble lord, himself an accomplished letter writer, smiling over this oracular sentence: "The shepherd in Virgil grew at last acquainted with Love, and found him a native of the rocks." Heine's irony, Voltaire's light touch would have stung more sharply, though somewhat of Johnson's dignified pathos would perhaps have been lost. Orators, in general, are not good letter writers. They are accustomed to the *ore rotundo* utterance, the "big bow-wow," and they crave the large audience instead of the audience of one.

The art of letter writing, then, is a relaxation, an art of leisure, of the idle moment, the mind at ease, the bow unbent, the loin ungirt. But there are times in every man's life when he has to write letters of a tenser mood, utterances of the passionate and agonized crises of the soul, love letters, death messages, farewells, confessions, entreaties. It seems profane to use the word *art* in such connections. Yet even a prayer, when it is articulate at all, follows the laws of human speech, though directed to the ear that heareth in secret. The collects of the church, being generalized prayer, employ a deliberate art.

Probably you have all been called upon to

write letters of condolence and have found it a very difficult thing to do. There is no harder test of tact, delicacy, and good taste. The least appearance of insincerity, the least intrusion of egotism, of an air of effort, an assumed solemnity, a moralizing or edifying pose, makes the whole letter ring false. Reserve is better here than the opposite extreme; better to say less than you feel than even to *seem* to say more.

There is a letter of Lincoln's, written to a mother whose sons had been killed in the Civil War, which is a brief model in this kind. I will not cite it here, for it has become a classic and is almost universally known. An engrossed copy of it hangs on the wall of Brasenose College, Oxford, as a specimen of the purest English diction—the diction of the Gettysburg address.

THACKERAY'S CENTENARY

AFTER all that has been written about Thackeray, it would be flat for me to present here another estimate of his work, or try to settle the relative value of his books. In this paper I shall endeavor only two things: first, to enquire what changes, in our way of looking at him, have come about in the half century since his death. Secondly, to give my own personal experience as a reader of Thackeray, in the hope that it may represent, in some degree, the experience of others.

What is left of Thackeray in this hundredth year since his birth? and how much of him has been eaten away by destructive criticism—or rather by time, that far more corrosive acid, whose silent operation criticism does but record? As the nineteenth century recedes, four names in the English fiction of that century stand out ever more clearly, as the great names: Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot. I know what may be said—what has been said—for others: Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters, Charles Reade, Trollope, Meredith, Steven-

son, Hardy. I believe that these will endure, but will endure as writers of a secondary importance. Others are already fading: Bulwer is all gone, and Kingsley is going fast.

The order in which I have named the four great novelists is usually, I think, the order in which the reader comes to them. It is also the order of their publication. For although Thackeray was a year older than Dickens, his first novels were later in date, and he was much later in securing his public. But the chronological reason is not the real reason why we read them in that order. It is because of their different appeal. Scott was a romancer, Dickens a humorist, Thackeray a satirist, and George Eliot a moralist. Each was much more than that; but that was what they were, reduced to the lowest term. Romance, humor, satire, and moral philosophy respectively were their starting point, their strongest impelling force, and their besetting sin. Whenever they fell below themselves, Walter Scott lapsed into sheer romantic unreality, Dickens into extravagant caricature, Thackeray into burlesque, George Eliot into psychology and ethical reflection.

I wonder whether your experience here is the same as mine. By the time that I was fourteen, as nearly as I can remember, I had read all the Waverley novels. Then I got hold of Dickens, and for two or three years

I lived in Dickens's world, though perhaps he and Scott somewhat overlapped at the edge—I cannot quite remember. I was sixteen when Thackeray died, and I heard my elders mourning over the loss. "Dear old Thackeray is gone," they told each other, and proceeded to reread all his books, with infinite laughter. So I picked up "Vanity Fair" and tried to enjoy it. But fresh from Scott's picturesque page and Dickens's sympathetic extravagances, how dull, insipid, repellent, disgusting were George Osborne, and fat Joseph Sedley, and Amelia and Becky! What sillies they were and how trivial their doings! "It's just about a lot of old girls," I said to my uncle, who laughed in a provokingly superior manner and replied, "My boy, those old girls are life." I will confess that even to this day, something of that shock of disillusion, that first cold plunge into "Vanity Fair," hangs about the book. I understand what Mr. Howells means when he calls it "the poorest of Thackeray's novels—crude, heavy-handed, caricatured." I ought to have begun, as he did, with "Pendennis," of which he writes, "I am still not sure but it is the author's greatest book." I don't know about that, but I know that it is the novel of Thackeray's that I have read most often and like the best, better than "Henry Esmond" or "Vanity Fair";

just as I prefer "The Mill on the Floss" to "Adam Bede," and "The House of the Seven Gables" to "The Scarlet Letter" (as Hawthorne did himself, by the way); or as I agree with Dickens that "Bleak House" was his best novel, though the public never thought so. We may concede to the critics that, objectively considered, and by all the rules of judgment, this or that work is its author's masterpiece and we *ought* to like it best—only we don't. We have our private preferences which we cannot explain and do not seek to defend. As for "Esmond," my comparative indifference to it is only, I suppose, a part of my dislike of the *genre*. I know the grounds on which the historical novel is recommended, and I know how intimately Thackeray's imagination was at home in the eighteenth century. Historically that is what he stands for: he was a Queen Anne man—like Austin Dobson: he passed over the great romantic generation altogether and joined on to Fielding and Goldsmith and their predecessors. Still no man knows the past as he does the present. I will take Thackeray's report of the London of his day; but I do not care very much about his reproduction of the London of 1745. Let me whisper to you that since early youth I have not been able to take much pleasure in the Waverley novels, except those parts of them

in which the author presents Scotch life and character as he knew them.

I think it was not till I was seventeen or eighteen, and a freshman in college, that I really got hold of Thackeray; but when once I had done so, the result was to drive Dickens out of my mind, as one nail drives out another. I never could go back to him after that. His sentiment seemed tawdry, his humor, buffoonery. Hung side by side, the one picture killed the other. "Dickens knows," said Thackeray, "that my books are a protest against him: that, if the one set are true, the other must be false." There is a species of ingratitude, of disloyalty, in thus turning one's back upon an old favorite who has furnished one so intense a pleasure and has had so large a share in one's education. But it is the cruel condition of all growth.

The heavens that now draw him with sweetness untold,
Once found, for new heavens he spurneth the old.

But when I advanced to George Eliot, as I did a year or two later, I did not find that her fiction and Thackeray's destroyed each other. I have continued to reread them both ever since and with undiminished satisfaction. And yet it was, in some sense, an advance. I would not say that George Eliot was

a greater novelist than Thackeray, nor even so great. But her message is more gravely intellectual: the psychology of her characters more deeply studied: the problems of life and mind more thoughtfully confronted. Thought, indeed, thought in itself and apart from the story, which is only a chosen illustration of a thesis, seems her principal concern. Thackeray is always concrete, never speculative or abstract. The mimetic instinct was strong in him, but weak in his great contemporary, to the damage and the final ruin of her art. His method was observation, hers analysis. Mr. Brownell says that Thackeray's characters are "delineated rather than dissected." There is little analysis, indeed hardly any literary criticism in his "English Humorists": only personal impressions. He deals with the men, not with the books. The same is true of his art criticisms. He is concerned with the sentiment of the picture, seldom with its technique, or even with its imaginative or expressional power.

In saying that Dickens was essentially a humorist and Thackeray a satirist, I do not mean, of course, that the terms are mutually exclusive. Thackeray was a great humorist as well as a satirist, but Dickens was hardly a satirist at all. I know that Mr. Chesterton says he was, but I cannot believe it. He cites

"Martin Chuzzlewit." Is "Martin Chuzzlewit" a satire on the Americans? It is a caricature—a very gross caricature—a piece of *bouffe*. But it lacks the true likeness which is the sting of satire. Dickens and Thackeray had, in common, a quick sense of the ridiculous, but they employed it differently. Dickens was a humorist almost in the Ben Jonsonian sense: his field was the odd, the eccentric, the grotesque—sometimes the monstrous; his books, and especially his later books, are full of queer people, frequently as incredible as Jonson's *dramatis personae*. In other words, he was a caricaturist. Mr. Howells says that Thackeray was a caricaturist, but I do not think he was so except incidentally; while Dickens was constantly so. When satire identifies itself with its object, it takes the form of parody. Thackeray was a parodist, a travesty writer, an artist in burlesque. What is the difference between caricature and parody? I take it to be this, that caricature is the ludicrous *exaggeration* of character for purely comic effect, while parody is its ludicrous *imitation* for the purpose of mockery. Now there is plenty of invention in Dickens, but little imitation. He began with broad *facetiae*—"Sketches by Boz" and the "Pickwick Papers"; while Thackeray began with travesty and kept up the habit more or less all his life. At the

Charterhouse he spent his time in drawing burlesque representations of Shakespeare, and composing parodies on L. E. L. and other lady poets. At Cambridge he wrote a mock heroic "Timbuctoo," the subject for the prize poem of the year—a prize which Tennyson captured. Later he wrote those capital travesties, "Rebecca and Rowena" and "Novels by Eminent Hands." In "Fitzboodle's Confessions" he wrote a sentimental ballad, "The Willow Tree," and straightway a parody of the same. You remember Lady Jane Sheepshanks who composed those lines comparing her youth to

> A violet shrinking meanly
> Where blow the March winds* keenly—
> A timid fawn on wildwood lawn
> Where oak-boughs rustle greenly.

I cannot describe the gleeful astonishment with which I discovered that Thackeray was even aware of our own excellent Mrs. Sigourney, whose house in Hartford I once inhabited (*et nos in Arcadia*). The passage is in "Blue-Beard's Ghost." "As Mrs. Sigourney sweetly sings:—

> " 'O the heart is a soft and delicate thing,
> O the heart is a lute with a thrilling string,
> A spirit that floats on a gossamer's wing.'

*Unquestionably Lady Jane pronounced it wīnds.

Such was Fatima's heart." Do not try to find these lines in Mrs. Sigourney's complete poems: they are not there. Thackeray's humor always had this satirical edge to it. Look at any engraving of the bust by Deville (the replica of which is in the National Portrait Gallery), which was taken when its subject was fourteen years old. There is a quizzical look about the mouth, prophetic and unmistakable. That boy is a tease: I would not like to be his little sister. And this boyish sense of fun never deserted the mature Thackeray. I like to turn sometimes from his big novels, to those delightful "Roundabout Papers" and the like where he gives a free rein to his frolic: "Memorials of Gormandizing," the "Ballads of Policeman X," "Mrs. Perkins' Ball," where the Mulligan of Ballymulligan, disdaining the waltz step of the Saxon, whoops around the room with his terrified partner in one of the dances of his own green land. Or that paper which describes how the author took the children to the zoölogical gardens, and how

First he saw the white bear, then he saw the black,
Then he saw the camel with a hump upon his back.
Chorus of Children:
Then he saw the camel with the HUMP upon his back.

Of course in all comic art there is a touch of caricature, i.e., of exaggeration. The Rev. Charles Honeyman in "The Newcomes," e.g., has been denounced as a caricature. But compare him with any of Dickens's clerical characters, such as Stiggins or Chadband, and say which is the fine art and which the coarse. And this brings me to the first of those particulars in which we do not view Thackeray quite as his contemporaries viewed him. In his own time he was regarded as the greatest of English realists. "I have no head above my eyes," he said. "I describe what I see." It is thus that Anthony Trollope regarded him, whose life of Thackeray was published in 1879. And of his dialogue, in special, Trollope writes, "The ear is never wounded by a tone that is false." It is not quite the same to-day. Zola and the *roman naturaliste* of the French and Russian novelists have accustomed us to forms of realism so much more drastic that Thackeray's realism seems, by comparison, reticent and partial. Not that he tells falsehoods, but that he does not and will not tell the whole truth. He was quite conscious, himself, of the limits which convention and propriety imposed upon him and he submitted to them willingly. "Since the author of 'Tom Jones' was buried," he wrote, "no writer of fiction has been permitted to depict, to his utmost

power, a Man." Thackeray's latest biographer, Mr. Whibley, notes in him certain early Victorian prejudices. He wanted to hang a curtain over Etty's nudities. Goethe's "Wahlverwandtschaften" scandalized him. He found the drama of Victor Hugo and Dumas "profoundly immoral and absurd"; and had no use for Balzac, his own closest parallel in French fiction. Mr. G. B. Shaw, the blasphemer of Shakespeare, speaks of Thackeray's "enslaved mind," yet admits that he tells the truth in spite of himself. "He exhausts all his feeble pathos in trying to make you sorry for the death of Col. Newcome, imploring you to regard him as a noble-hearted gentleman, instead of an insufferable old fool . . . but he gives you the facts about him faithfully." But the denial of Thackeray's realism goes farther than this and attacks in some instances the truthfulness of his character portrayal. Thus Mr. Whibley, who acknowledges, in general, that Thackeray was "a true naturalist," finds that the personages in several of his novels are "drawn in varying planes." Charles Honeyman and Fred Bayham, e.g., are frank caricatures; Helen and Laura Pendennis, and "Stunning" Warrington are somewhat unreal; Colonel Newcome is overdrawn—"the travesty of a man"; and even Beatrix Esmond, whom Mr. Brownell pronounces her

creator's masterpiece, is a "picturesque apparition rather than a real woman." And finally comes Mr. Howells and affirms that Thackeray is no realist but a caricaturist: Jane Austen and Trollope are the true realists.

Well, let it be granted that Thackeray is imperfectly realistic. I am not concerned to defend him. Nor shall I enter into this wearisome discussion of what realism is or is not, further than to say that I don't believe the thing exists; that is, I don't believe that photographic fiction—the "mirror up to nature" fiction—exists or can exist. A mirror reflects, a photograph reproduces its object without selection or rejection. Does any artist do this? Try to write the history of one day: everything—literally everything—that you have done, said, thought: and everything that you have seen done, or heard said during twenty-four hours. That would be realism, but, suppose it possible, what kind of reading would it make? The artist must select, reject, combine, and he does it differently from every other artist: he mixes his personality with his art, colors his art with it. The point of view from which he works is personal to himself: satire is a point of view, humor is a point of view, so is religion, so is morality, so is optimism or pessimism, or any philosophy, temper, or

mood. In speaking of the great Russians Mr. Howells praises their "transparency of style, unclouded by any mist of the personality which we mistakenly value in style, and which ought no more to be there than the artist's personality should be in a portrait." This seems to me true; though it was said long ago, the style is the man. Yet if this transparency, this impersonality is measurably attainable in the style, it is not so in the substance of the novel. If an impersonal report of life is the ideal of naturalistic or realistic fiction—and I don't say it is—then it is an impossible ideal. People are saying now that Zola is a romantic writer. Why? Because, however well documented, his facts are *selected* to make a particular impression. I suppose the reason why Thackeray's work seemed so much more realistic to his generation than it does to ours was that his particular point of view was that of the satirist, and his satire was largely directed to the exposure of cant, humbug, affectation, and other forms of unreality. Disillusion was his trade. He had no heroes, and he saw all things in their unheroic and unromantic aspect. You all know his famous caricature of Ludovicus Rex inside and outside of his court clothes: a most majestic, bewigged and beruffled *grand monarque:* and then a spindle-shanked, pot-bellied, bald little man—

a good illustration for a chapter in "Sartor Resartus." The ship in which Thackeray was sent home from India, a boy of six, touched at St. Helena and he saw Napoleon. He always remembered him as a little fat man in a suit of white duck and a palm-leaf hat.

Thackeray detested pose and strut and sham heroics. He called Byron "a big sulky dandy." "Lord Byron," he said, "wrote more cant . . . than any poet I know of. Think of the 'peasant girls with dark blue eyes' of the Rhine—the brown-faced, flat-nosed, thick-lipped, dirty wenches! Think of 'filling high a cup of Samian wine': . . . Byron himself always drank gin." The captain in "The White Squall" does not pace the deck like a dark-browed corsair, but calls, "George, some brandy and water!"

And this reminds me of Thackeray's poetry. Of course one who held this attitude toward the romantic and the heroic could not be a poet in the usual sense. Poetry holds the quintessential truth, but, as Bacon says, it "subdues the shows of things to the desires of the mind"; while realism clings to the shows of things, and satire disenchants, ravels the magic web which the imagination weaves. Heine was both satirist and poet, but he was each by turns, and he had the touch of ideality which Thackeray lacked. Yet Thackeray wrote poetry and good poetry of

a sort. But it has beauty purely of sentiment, never of the imagination that transcends the fact. Take the famous lines with which this same "White Squall" closes:

> And when, its force expended,
> The harmless storm was ended,
> And as the sunrise splendid
> Came blushing o'er the sea;
> I thought, as day was breaking,
> My little girls were waking
> And smiling and making
> A prayer at home for me.

And such is the quality of all his best things in verse—"The Mahogany Tree," "The Ballad of Bouillebaisse," "The End of the Play"; a mixture of humor and pensiveness, homely fact and sincere feeling.

Another modern criticism of Thackeray is that he is always interrupting his story with reflections. This fault, if it is a fault, is at its worst in "The Newcomes," from which a whole volume of essays might be gathered. The art of fiction is a progressive art and we have learned a great deal from the objective method of masters like Turgenev, Flaubert, and Maupassant. I am free to confess, that, while I still enjoy many of the passages in which the novelist appears as chorus and showman, I do find myself more impatient of them than I used to be. I find myself skipping a good deal. I wonder if this is also your ex-

perience. I am not sure, however, but there are signs of a reaction against the slender, episodic, short-story kind of fiction, and a return to the old-fashioned, biographical novel. Mr. Brownell discusses this point and says that "when Thackeray is reproached with 'bad art' for intruding upon his scene, the reproach is chiefly the recommendation of a different technique. And each man's technique is his own." The question, he acutely observes, is whether Thackeray's subjectivity destroys illusion or deepens it. He thinks that the latter is true. I will not argue the point further than to say that, whether clumsy or not, Thackeray's method is a thoroughly English method and has its roots in the history of English fiction. He is not alone in it. George Eliot, Hawthorne, and Trollope and many others practise it; and he learned it from his master, Fielding.

Fifty years ago it was quite common to describe Thackeray as a cynic, a charge from which Shirley Brooks defended him in the well-known verses contributed to "Punch" after the great novelist's death. Strange that such a mistake should ever have been made about one whose kindness is as manifest in his books as in his life: "a big, fierce, weeping man," as Carlyle grotesquely describes him: a writer in whom we find to-day even an excess of sentiment and a

persistent geniality which sometimes irritates. But the source of the misapprehension is not far to seek. His satiric and disenchanting eye saw, with merciless clairvoyance, the disfigurements of human nature, and dwelt upon them perhaps unduly. He saw

> How very weak the very wise,
> How very small the very great are.

Moreover, as with many other humorists, with Thomas Hood and Mark Twain and Abraham Lincoln (who is one of the foremost American humorists), a deep melancholy underlay his fun. *Vanitas vanitatum* is the last word of his philosophy. Evil seemed to him stronger than good and death better than life. But he was never bitter: his pen was driven by love, not hate. Swift was the true cynic, the true misanthrope; and Thackeray's dislike of him has led him into some injustice in his chapter on Swift in "The English Humorists." And therefore I have never been able to enjoy "The Luck of Barry Lyndon" which has the almost unanimous praises of the critics. The hard, artificial irony of the book—maintained, of course, with superb consistency—seems to me uncharacteristic of its author. It repels and wearies me, as does its model, "Jonathan Wild." Swift's irony I enjoy because it is

the natural expression of his character. With Thackeray it is a mask.

Lastly I come to a point often urged against Thackeray. The favorite target of his satire was the snob. His lash was always being laid across flunkeyism, tuft hunting, the "mean admiration of mean things," such as wealth, rank, fashion, title, birth. Now, it is said, his constant obsession with this subject, his acute consciousness of social distinctions, prove that he is himself one of the class that he is ridiculing. "Letters four do form his name," to use a phrase of Dr. Holmes, who is accused of the same weakness, and, I think, with more reason. Well, Thackeray owned that he was a snob, and said that we are all of us snobs in a greater or less degree. Snobbery is the fat weed of a complex civilization, where grades are unfixed, where some families are going down and others rising in the world, with the consequent jealousies, heartburnings, and social struggles. In India, I take it, where a rigid caste system prevails, there are no snobs. A Brahmin may refuse to eat with a lower caste man, whose touch is contamination, but he does not despise him as the gentleman despises the cad, as the man who eats with a fork despises the man who eats with a knife, or as the educated Englishman despises the Cockney who drops his h's, or the Boston Brahmin the Yankee

provincial who says *haöw*, the woman who *callates*, and the gent who wears *pants*. In feudal ages the lord might treat the serf like a beast of the field. The modern swell does not oppress his social inferior: he only calls him a bounder. In primitive states of society differences in riches, station, power are accepted quite simply: they do not form ground for envy or contempt. I used to be puzzled by the conventional epithet applied by Homer to Eumaeus—"the godlike swineherd"—which is much as though one should say, nowadays, the godlike garbage collector. But when Pope writes

> Honor and fame from no condition rise

he writes a lying platitude. In the eighteenth century, and in the twentieth, honor and fame do rise from condition. Now in the presence of the supreme tragic emotions, of death, of suffering, all men are equal. But this social inequality is the region of the comedy of manners, and that is the region in which Thackeray's comedy moves—the *comédie mondaine*, if not the full *comédie humaine*. It is a world of convention, and he is at home in it, in the world and a citizen of the world. Of course it is not primitively human. Manners are a convention: but so are morals, laws, society, the state, the church. I suppose it is because Thackeray

dwelt contentedly in these conventions and rather liked them although he laughed at them, that Shaw calls him an enslaved mind. At any rate, this is what Mr. Howells means when he writes: "When he made a mock of snobbishness, I did not know but snobbishness was something that might be reached and cured by ridicule. Now I know that so long as we have social inequality we shall have snobs: we shall have men who bully and truckle, and women who snub and crawl. I know that it is futile to spurn them, or lash them for trying to get on in the world, and that the world is what it must be from the selfish motives which underlie our economic life. . . . This is the toxic property of all Thackeray's writing. . . . He rails at the order of things, but he imagines nothing different." In other words, Thackeray was not a socialist, as Mr. Shaw is, and Mr. Howells, and as we are all coming measurably to be. Meanwhile, however, equality is a dream.

All his biographers are agreed that Thackeray was honestly fond of mundane advantages. He liked the conversation of clever, well-mannered gentlemen, and the society of agreeable, handsome, well-dressed women. He liked to go to fine houses: liked his club, and was gratified when asked to dine with Sir Robert Peel or the Duke of Devonshire. Speaking of the South and of slavery,

he confessed that he found it impossible to think ill of people who gave you such good claret.

This explains his love of Horace. Venables reports that he would not study his Latin at school. But he certainly brought away with him from the Charterhouse, or from Trinity, a knowledge of Horace. You recall what delightful, punning use he makes of the lyric Roman at every turn. It is *solvuntur rupes* when Colonel Newcome's Indian fortune melts away; and *Rosa sera moratur* when little Rose is slow to go off in the matrimonial market. Now Horace was eminently a man of the world, a man about town, a club man, a gentle satirist, with a cheerful, mundane philosophy of life, just touched with sadness and regret. He was the poet of an Augustan age, like that English Augustan age which was Thackeray's favorite; social, gregarious, urban.

I never saw Thackeray. I was a boy of eight when he made his second visit to America, in the winter of 1855-56. But Arthur Hollister, who graduated at Yale in 1858, told me that he once saw Thackeray walking up Chapel Street, a colossal figure, six feet four inches in height, peering through his big glasses with that expression which is familiar to you in his portraits and in his charming caricatures of his own face.

This seemed to bring him rather near. But I think the nearest that I ever felt to his bodily presence was once when Mr. Evarts showed me a copy of Horace, with inserted engravings, which Thackeray had given to Sam Ward and Ward had given to Evarts. It was a copy which Thackeray had used and which had his autograph on the flyleaf.

And this mention of his Latin scholarship induces me to close with an anecdote that I find in Melville's "Life." He says himself that it is almost too good to be true, but it illustrates so delightfully certain academic attitudes, that I must give it, authentic or not. The novelist was to lecture at Oxford and had to obtain the license of the Vice-Chancellor. He called on him for the necessary permission and this was the dialogue that ensued:

V. C. Pray, sir, what can I do for you?

T. My name is Thackeray.

V. C. So I see by this card.

T. I seek permission to lecture within your precincts.

V. C. Ah! You are a lecturer: what subjects do you undertake, religious or political?

T. Neither. I am a literary man.

V. C. Have you written anything?

T. Yes, I am the author of "Vanity Fair."

V. C. I presume, a dissenter—has that anything to do with Jno. Bunyan's book?

T. Not exactly: I have also written "Pendennis."

V. C. Never heard of these works, but no doubt they are proper books.

T. I have also contributed to "Punch."

V. C. "Punch." I have heard of that. Is it not a ribald publication?

RETROSPECTS AND PROSPECTS OF THE ENGLISH DRAMA*

THE English drama has been dead for nearly two hundred years. Mr. Gosse says that in 1700 the English had the most vivacious school of comedy in Europe. And, if their serious drama was greatly inferior, still the best tragedies of Dryden and Otway —and perhaps of Lee, Southerne, and Rowe —made not only a sounding success on the boards, but a fair bid for literary honors. Ten years later the drama was moribund, and in 1747 its epitaph was spoken by Garrick in the sonorous prologue written by Dr. Johnson for the opening of Drury Lane:

Then, crushed by rules and weakened as refined,
For years the power of Tragedy declined:
From bard to bard the frigid caution crept,

*This article was printed in the *North American Review* in two instalments, in May, 1905, and July, 1907. The growth of the literary drama in the last fifteen years has been so marked, and plays of such high quality have been put upon the stage by new writers like Barrie, Synge, Masefield, Kennedy, Moody, Sheldon, and others, that these prophecies and reflections may seem out of date. The article is retained, notwithstanding, for whatever there may be in it that is true of drama in general.

Till declamation roared whilst passion slept.
Yet still did Virtue deign the stage to tread;
Philosophy remained though nature fled.
But, forced at length her ancient reign to quit,
She saw great Faustus lay the ghost of wit:
Exulting Folly hailed the joyful day,
And pantomime and song confirmed her sway—

That is, as has been complained a hundred times before and since, the opera and the spectacular show drove the legitimate drama from the stage.

The theatre, indeed, is not dead: it has continued to live and to flourish, and is furnishing entertainment to the public to-day, as it did two hundred—nay, two thousand—years ago. The theatre, as an institution, has a life of its own, whose history is recorded in innumerable volumes. Playhouses have multiplied in London, in the provinces, in all English-speaking lands. The callings of the actor and the playwright have given occupation to many, and rich rewards to not a few. Scholars, critics, and literary men are apt to look at the drama as if it were simply a department of literature. In reading a play, we should remember that we are taking the author at a disadvantage. It is not meant to be read, but to be acted. It is not mere literature: it is both more and less than literature. The art of the theatre is a composite art, requiring the help of the scene-painter, the cos-

tumer, the manager, the stage-carpenter, sometimes of the musician and dancer, nowadays of the electrician; and always and above all demanding the interpretation of the actor. It is not addressed to the understanding exclusively, but likewise to the eye and the ear. It is a show, as well as a piece of writing. The drama can subsist without any dialogue at all, as in the pantomime; or with the dialogue reduced to its lowest terms, as in the Italian *commedie a soggetto*, where the actors improvised the lines. "The skeleton of every play is a pantomime," says Professor Brander Matthews, who reminds us that not only buffoonery and acrobatic performances may be carried on silently by stock characters like Harlequin, Columbine, Pantaloon, and Punchinello; but a story of a more pretentious kind may be enacted entirely by gesture and dumb show, as in the French pantomime play "*L'Enfant Prodigue.*" A good dramatist includes a good playwright, one who can invent striking situations, telling climaxes, tableaux, *ensemble* scenes, spectacular and histrionic effects, *coups de théâtre.* These things may seem to the literary student the merely mechanical or technical parts of the art. Yet, without them, a play will be amateurish, and no really successful dramatist has ever been lacking in this kind of skill.

Still, although stage presentation, the *mise en scène*, is the touchstone of a play as play, it is of course quite possible to read a play with pleasure. It is even better to read it than to see it badly acted, just as one would rather have no pictures in a novel than such pictures as disturb one's ideas of the characters. A musical adept can take pleasure in reading the score of an opera, though he would rather hear it performed. This is not to say that a play depends for its effect upon actual performance in anywhere near the same degree as a musical composition; for written speech is a far more definite language than musical notation. I use the latter only as an imperfect illustration.

This professional quality has been much insisted on by practical playwrights, who are properly contemptuous of closet drama. But just what is a closet drama? Let it be defined provisionally as a piece meant to be read and not acted. Yet a play's chances for representation depend partly on the condition of the theatre and the demands of the public. Mr. Yeats, for example, thinks that a play of any poetic or spiritual depth has no chance to-day in a big London theatre, with an audience living on the surface of life; and he advises that such plays be tried in small suburban or country playhouses before audiences of scholars and simple, unspoiled folk.

To the English public, with its desire for strong action and variety, Racine's tragedies are nothing but closet dramas; and yet they are played constantly and with applause in the French theatre. In the eighteenth century, when the English stage still maintained a literary tradition,—though it had lost all literary vitality,—the rankest sort of closet dramas were frequently put on and listened to respectfully. No manager now would venture to mount such a thing as "Cato" or "Sophonisba" or "The Castle Spectre." The modern public will scarcely endure sheer poetry, or long descriptive and reflective tirades even in Shakespeare. Such passages have to be cut in the acting versions. The Elizabethan craving for drama was such that everything was tried, though some things, when brought to the test of action, proved failures. Ben Jonson's heavy tragedies, "Catiline" and "Sejanus," failed on the stage; and Daniel's "Cleopatra" never got so far as the stage, a rare example of an Elizabethan closet drama. Very likely, modern literary plays like "Philip Van Artevelde" and Tennyson's "Queen Mary" might have succeeded in the seventeenth century. For the audiences of those days were omnivorous. They hungered for sensation, but they enjoyed as well fine poetry, noble declamation, philosophy, sweet singing, and the clown with

his funny business, all in close neighborhood. They cared more for quantity of life than for delicate art. Their art, indeed, was in some ways quite artless, and the drama had not yet purged itself of lyric, epic, and didactic elements, nor attained a purely dramatic type. Since then, the French, whose ideal is not so much fulness of life as perfection of form, have taught English playwrights many lessons. Brunetière, speaking of the gradual evolution and differentiation of literary kinds (*genres*), says that Shakespeare's theatre, as theatre, exhibits the art of drama in its infancy.

Perhaps, then, no hard and fast line can be drawn between an acting drama and a closet play. It is largely a matter of contemporary taste. "Cato," we know, made a prodigious hit. Coleridge's "Remorse," a closet drama if there ever was one, and a very rubbishy affair at that, was put on by Sheridan, though with many misgivings, and lasted twenty nights, a good run for those days. No audience now would stand it an hour. And yet we have seen Sir Henry Irving forcing Tennyson's dramatic poems into a temporary *succès d'estime*. "Samson Agonistes" is a closet play, without question; but is "The Cenci"? Shelley wanted it played, and had selected Miss O'Niel for the rôle of Beatrice. But it never got itself

played till 1889, when it was given before the Shelley Society at South Kensington. The picked audience applauded it, just as an academic audience will applaud a rehearsal of the "Antigone" in the original Greek; but the dramatic critics sent down by the London newspapers to report the performance were unconvinced.

Let it be granted, then, that the question in the case of any given play is a question of more or less. Still, the difference between our modern literary drama, as a whole, and the Elizabethan drama,—which was also literary, —as a whole, I take to be this: that in our time literature has lost touch with the stage. In the seventeenth century, the poets *wrote for* the theatre. They knew that their plays would be played. In the nineteenth century, English poets who adopted the dramatic framework did not write for the theatre. They did not expect their pieces to be played, and they addressed themselves consciously to the reader. When one of them had the luck to get upon the boards, it was an exception, and the manager generally lost money by it. Thus, in the late thirties and early forties, in one of those efforts to "elevate the stage," which recur with comic persistence in our dramatic annals, Macready rallied the *literati* to his aid and presented, among other things, Taylor's "Philip Van

Artevelde," Talfourd's "Ion," Bulwer's "Richelieu" and "The Lady of Lyons," and Browning's "Stafford" and "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon." The only titles on this list that secured a permanent foothold on the repertoire of the playhouses were Bulwer's two pieces, which were precisely the most flimsy of the whole lot, from the literary point of view. "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon" has been tried again. As I saw it a number of years ago, with Lawrence Barrett cast for Lord Tresham and Marie Wainwright as Mildred, it seemed to me—in spite of its somewhat absurd *motivirung*—decidedly impressive as an acting play. On the other hand, "In a Balcony," though very intelligently and sympathetically presented by Mrs. Lemoyne and Otis Skinner, was too subtle for a popular audience, and was manifestly unfitted for the stage.

The closet drama is a quite legitimate product of literary art. The playhouse has no monopoly of the dramatic form. Indeed, as the closet dramatist is not bound to consider the practical exigencies of the theatre, to consult the prejudices of the manager or the spectators, fill the pockets of the company, or provide a rôle for a star performer, he has, in many ways, a freer hand than the professional playwright. He need not sacrifice truth of character and probability of

plot to the need of highly accentuated situations. He does not have to consider whether a speech is too long, too ornate in diction, too deeply thoughtful for recitation by an actor. If the action lags at certain points, let it lag. In short, as the aim of the closet dramatist is other than the playwright's, so his methods may be independent.

In the rather bitter preface to the printed version of "Saints and Sinners" (1891), Mr. Henry Arthur Jones complains of "the English practice of writing plays to order for a star performer," together with other "binding and perplexing . . . conventions and limitations of playwriting," as "quite sufficient to account for the literary degradation of the modern drama." The English closet drama of the nineteenth century is an important body of literature, of higher intellectual value than all the stage plays produced in England during the same period. It is not necessary to enumerate its triumphs: I will merely remind the reader, in passing, that work like Byron's "Manfred," Landor's "Gebir," George Eliot's "The Spanish Gypsy," Beddoes's "Death's Jest-Book," Arnold's "Empedocles on Etna," Tennyson's "Becket," Browning's "Pippa Passes" and Swinburne's "Atalanta in Calydon," is justified in its assumption of the dramatic form, though its appeal is only to the closet reader.

I do not forget that one or two of these have been tried upon the stage, but they do not belong there, and, as theatre pieces, were flat failures.

It is hard to say exactly what qualities ensure stage success. As reading plays, Lillo's "George Barnwell" is intolerably stilted, Knowles's "Virginius" insipid, "The Lady of Lyons" tawdry; yet all of them took notoriously, and the last two—as any one can testify who has seen them performed—retain a certain effectiveness even now. Perhaps the secret lies in simplicity and directness of construction, unrelaxing tension, quick movement, and an instinctive seizure of the essentially dramatic crises in the action. In a word, the thing has "go"; lacking which, no cleverness of dialogue, no epigrammatic sharpness of wit or delicate play of humor can save a comedy; and no beauty of style, no depth or reach of thought, a tragedy. Hence it is pertinent to remark how many popular playwrights have been actors or in close practical relations with the theatre. In the seventeenth century this was a matter of course. Shakespeare was an actor, and Molière and Jonson and Marlowe and Greene and Otway, and countless others. Cibber was an actor and stage-manager. Sheridan and both Colmans were managers. Garrick and Foote wrote plays as well

as acted them. Knowles, Boucicault, Robertson, Pinero and Stephen Phillips have all been actors.

Conceded that this professional point of view has been rightly emphasized, yet before the acted drama can rank as literature, or even hope to hold possession of the stage itself for more than a season, it must stand a further test. It must read well, too. If it is no more than an after-dinner amusement, without intellectual meaning or vital relation to life: if it has neither strength nor truth nor beauty as a criticism of life, or an imaginative representation of life, what interest can it have for serious people? Let us stay at home and read our Thackeray. Eugène Scribe was perhaps the cunningest master of stagecraft who ever wrote. Schlegel ranked him above Molière. He left the largest fortune ever accumulated by a French man of letters. His plays were more popular in all the theatres of Europe than anything since Kotzebue's melodramas; and all European purveyors for the stage strove to imitate the adroitness and ingenuity with which his plots were put together. But if one to-day tries to *read* any one of his three hundred and fifty pieces—say, "Adrienne Lecouvreur" or "La Bataille des Dames"—one will find little in them beyond the mechanical perfection of the construction, and will feel how powerless

mere technical cleverness is to keep alive false and superficial conceptions.

When it is asserted, then, that the British drama has been dead for nearly two hundred years, what is really meant is that its *literary* vitality went out of it some two centuries ago, and has not yet come back. It is hard to say what causes the breath of life suddenly to enter some particular literary form, inspire it fully for a few years, and then desert it for another; leaving it all flaccid and inanimate. Literary forms have their periods. No one now sits down to compose an epic poem or a minstrel ballad or a five-act blank-verse tragedy without an uneasy sense of anachronism. The dramatic form had run along in England for generations, from the mediaeval miracles down to the rude chronicle histories, Senecan tragedies, and clownish interludes of the sixteenth century. Suddenly, in the last years of that century, the spark of genius touched and kindled it into the great drama of Elizabeth. About the middle of the eighteenth century life abandoned it again, and took possession of the novel. Fielding is the point of contact between the dying drama and new-born fiction. The whole process of the change may be followed in him. "Tom Jones" and "Amelia" still rank as masterpieces, but who reads "The Modern Husband," or "Miss Lucy in

Town," or "Love in Several Masques," or any other of Fielding's plays? How many even know that he wrote any plays? Mr. Shaw attributes Fielding's change of base to the government censorship. He writes:

> In 1737 Henry Fielding, the greatest practising dramatist, with the single exception of Shakspere, produced by England between the Middle Ages and the nineteenth century, devoted his genius to the task of exposing and destroying parliamentary corruption. . . . Walpole . . . promptly gagged the stage by a censorship which is in full force at the present moment [1898]. Fielding, driven out of the trade of Molière and Aristophanes, took to that of Cervantes; and since then, the English novel has been one of the glories of literature, whilst the English drama has been its disgrace.

But Mr. Shaw's explanation fails to explain, and his estimate of Fielding's talent for drama is too high. With the exception of "Tom Thumb," his plays are very dull, and it is doubtful whether, given the freest hand, he would ever have become a great dramatist. It was not Walpole but the *Zeitgeist* that was responsible for his failure in one literary form and his triumph in another. The clock had run down, and though Goldsmith and Sheridan wound it up once more towards the end of the century, it only went for an hour or so. It is usual to refer to their comedy

group as the last flare of the literary drama in England before its final extinction.

In the appendix to Clement Scott's "The Drama of Yesterday and To-day" there is given, by way of supplement to Genest, a list of the new plays put on at London theatres between 1830 and 1900. They number about twenty-four hundred; and—until we reach the last decade of the century—it would be hard to pick out a dozen of them which have become a part of English literature: which any one would think of reading for pleasure or profit, as one reads, say, the plays of Marlowe or Fletcher or Congreve. Of course, many of the pieces on the list are of non-literary kinds—burlesques, vaudevilles, operas, and the like. Then there is a large body of translations and adaptations from the foreign drama, more especially from the French of Scribe, Sardou, Dumas, *père et fils*, d'Hennery, Labiche, Goudinet, Meilhac and Halévy, Ohnet, and many others. Next to the French theatre, the most abundant feeder of our modern stage has been contemporary fiction. Nowadays, every successful novel is immediately dramatized. This has been the case, more or less, for three-quarters of a century. The Waverley Novels were dramatized in their time, and Dickens's stories in theirs, and there are a plenty of dramatized novels on Scott's catalogue. But

the practice has greatly increased of recent years. Now, for some reason, a dramatized novel seldom means a good play; that is to say, permanently good, though it may act fairly well for a season. One does not care to *read* the stage version of "Vanity Fair," known as "Becky Sharp," any more than one would care to read "The School for Scandal" diluted into a novel. The dramatist conceives and moulds his theme otherwise than the novelist. "Playwriting," says Walter Scott, "is the art of forming situations." To be sure, Shakespeare took plots from Italian "novels," so called; that is, short romantic tales like Boccaccio's or Bandello's. But he took only the bare outline, and altered freely. The modern novel is a far more elaborate thing. In it, not only incident and character, but a great part of the dialogue is already done to hand.

Glancing over Clement Scott's list, old playgoers will find their memories somewhat pathetically stirred by forgotten fashions and schools. There are Planché's extravaganzas, and later Dion Boucicault's versatilities—"classical" comedies like "London Assurance," sentimental Irish melodramas—"The Shaughraun," "The Colleen Bawn"—and popular favorites, such as "Rip Van Winkle"; the equally versatile Tom Taylor, with his "Our American Cousin," "The

Ticket-of-Leave Man," etc.; Burnand's multifarious *facetiae;* the cockney vulgarities of that very prolific Mr. H. J. Byron; and, in the late sixties, Robertson's "cup-and-saucer" comedies—"Ours," "Caste," "Society," "School." Three thousand representations of these fashionable comedies were given inside of twenty years. How gay, how brilliant, even, the dialogue seemed to us in those good old days! But take up the text of one of Tom Robertson's plays now and try to read it. What has become of the sparkle? Does any one recall the famous "Ours" *galop* that we used to dance to *consule Planco? Eheu fugaces!*

The playwriters whom I have named, and others whom I might have named, their contemporaries, were the Clyde Fitches, Augustus Thomases, and George Ades of their generation. They provided a fair article of entertainment for the public of their time, but they added nothing to literature. The poverty of the English stage, during these late centuries, in work of real substance and value, is the more striking because there has been no dearth of genius in other departments. There have been great English poets, novelists, humorists, essayists, critics, historians. Moreover, the literary drama has flourished in other countries. France has never lacked accomplished artists in this

kind: from Voltaire to Victor Hugo, from Hugo to Rostand, talent always, and genius not unfrequently, have been at the service of the French theatres. In Germany—with some breaks—the case has been the same. From Lessing and Goethe and Schiller down to our own contemporaries, to Hauptmann, Sudermann, and Halbe, Germany has seldom been without worthy dramatists. Both the Germans and the French have taken the theatre seriously. Their actors have been carefully trained, their audiences intelligently critical, their playhouses in part maintained by government subventions, as institutions importantly related to the national life.

It is not that English men of letters have been unwilling to contribute to the stage. On the contrary, they have shown an eager, although mostly ineffectual, ambition for dramatic honors. In the eighteenth century it was well-nigh the rule that a successful writer should try his hand at a play. Addison did so, and Steele, Pope, Gay, Fielding, Johnson, Goldsmith, Smollett, Thomson, Mason, Mallet, Chatterton, and many others who had no natural turn for it, and would not think of such a thing now. In the nineteenth century the tradition had lost much of its force: still, we find Scott, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Tennyson, Thackeray, Browning, Matthew Arnold, Swinburne, all

using the dramatic form, and some of them attempting the stage. Charles Lamb, one of the most ardent of playgoers and best of dramatic critics, was greatly chagrined by the failure of his farce, "Mr. H——." Dickens was a good actor in private theatricals, and was intensely concerned with the theatre and the theatrical fortunes of his own dramatized novels. So was Charles Reade, who collaborated with Tom Taylor in a number of plays, and whose theatre-piece "Masks and Faces," was the original of his novelette, "Peg Woffington"—*vice versa* the usual case. More recently we have seen Stevenson and Henley collaborating in three plays, "Deacon Brodie" and "Beau Austin," performed at London and Montreal in 1884-87, and "Admiral Guinea," shown at the Haymarket in 1890; the first and third, low-life melodrama and broad comedy, of some vigor but no great importance; the second, an unusually good eighteenth century society play. Most certainly these experiments do not rank with Stevenson's romances or Henley's poems. Another curious illustration of the attraction of the dramatic form for the literary mind is Thomas Hardy's "The Dynasts" (1904), a drama of the Napoleonic wars, projected in nineteen acts, with choruses of spirits and personified abstractions; a sort of reversion to the class of morality and

chronicle play exemplified in Bale's "King John." Mr. Hardy is perhaps the foremost living English novelist, but "The Dynasts" is a dramatic monster, and, happily, a torso. The preface confesses that the abortion is a "panoramic show" and intended for "mental performance" only, and suggests an apology for closet drama by inquiring whether "mental performance alone may not eventually be the fate of all drama other than that of contemporary or frivolous life."

Mr. Henry James, too, has tempted the stage, teased, yet fascinated, by the "insufferable little art"; and the result is a dramatized version of "Daisy Miller," and two volumes of "Theatricals": "Tenants" and "Disengaged" (1894); "The Album" and "The Reprobate" (1895). These last were written with a view to their being played at country theatres (an opportunity having seemingly presented itself), but they never got so far. In reading them, one feels that a single rehearsal would have decided their chances. Mr. James, in the preface to the printed plays, treats his failure with humorous resignation. He complains of "the hard meagreness inherent in the theatrical form," and of his own conscientious effort to avoid supersubtlety and to cultivate an "anxious simplicity" and a "deadly directness"—to write "something elaborately plain." It was

to be expected that Mr. James's habit of refined analysis would prove but a poor preparation for acted drama; and that his singular coldness or shyness or reticence would handicap him fatally in emotional crises. Whenever he is led squarely up to such, he bolts. Innuendo is not the language of passion. In vain he cries: "See me being popular: observe this play to the gallery." The failure is so complete as to have the finality of a demonstration.

What was less to be expected is the odd way in which this artist drops realism for melodrama and farce when he exchanges fiction for playwriting. Sir Ralph Damant, in "The Album," is a farce or "humor" character in the Jonsonian sense, his particular obsession being a fixed idea that all the women in the play want to marry him. In "Disengaged," Mrs. Wigmore, a campaigner with a trained daughter, is another farce character; and there are iterations of phrase and catchwords here and elsewhere, as in Dickens's or Jonson's humorists. In "The Reprobate," Paul Doubleday and Pitt Brunt, M.P., have the accentuated contrast of the Surface brothers. In "The Album," that innocent old stage trick is played again, whereby some article—a lace handkerchief, a scrap of paper, a necklace, or what not—is made the plot centre. In "Daisy Miller"—

dramatized version—the famous little masterpiece is spoiled by the substitution of a conventional happy ending and the introduction of a blackmailing villain. All this insinuates a doubt as to the reality of a realism which turns into improbability and artificiality merely by a change in the method of presentation. But the doubt is unfair. No *reductio ad absurdum* has occurred, but simply another instance of the law that every art has its own method, and that the method of the novel is not that of the play. Of course, there are clever things in the dialogue of these three-act comedies, for Mr. James is always Mr. James. But the only one of them that comes near to being a practicable theatre piece is "Tenants," which has a good plot founded on a French story.

The paralysis of the literary drama, then, has not been due to the indifference of the literary class. Perhaps it is time thrown away to seek for its cause. The fact is that, for one reason or another, England has lost the dramatic habit.

The past fifteen or twenty years have witnessed one more concerted effort to "elevate the English stage," and this time with a fair prospect of results. There is a stir of expectation: the new drama is announced and already in part arrived. It would be premature to proclaim success as yet; but thus much

may be affirmed, that the dramatic output of the last quarter-century outweighs that of any other quarter-century since 1700. Here, for instance, are the titles of a dozen contemporary plays which it would be hard to match with any equal number produced during an equal period of time since the failure of Congreve's latest and most brilliant comedy, "The Way of the World," marked the close of the Restoration drama: W. S. Gilbert's "Pygmalion and Galatea"; Sydney Grundy's "An Old Jew"; Henry Arthur Jones's "Judah" and "The Liars"; Arthur Wing Pinero's "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" and "The Benefit of the Doubt"; George Bernard Shaw's "Candida" and "Arms and the Man"; Oscar Wilde's "Salome" and "Lady Windermere's Fan"; Stephen Phillips's "Ulysses"; and W. Butler Yeats's "The Land of Heart's Desire." (I have gone back a few years to include Mr. Gilbert's piece, first given at the Haymarket in 1871.)

Every one of these dramas has been performed with acceptance, every one of them is a contribution to literature, worthy the attention of cultivated readers. I do not say that any one of them is a masterpiece, or that collectively they will hold the stage as Goldsmith's and Sheridan's are still holding it a century and a quarter after their first

production. But I will venture to say that, taken together, they constitute a more solid and varied group of dramatic works than that favorite little bunch of "classical" comedies, and offer a securer ground of hope for the future of the British stage. It will be observed that half of them are tragedies, or plays of a serious interest; also that they do not form a school, in the sense in which the French tragedy of Louis XIV, or the English comedy of the Restoration, was a school—that is, a compact dramatic group, limited in subject and alike in manner. They are the work of individual talents, conforming to no single ideal, but operating on independent lines. And it would be easy to add a second dozen by the same authors little, if at all, inferior to those on the first list.

Probably the foremost English playwriter of to-day is Mr. A. W. Pinero, whether tried by the test of popular success in the theatre, or by the literary quality of his printed dramas. He learned his art as Shakespeare learned his, by practical experience as an actor, and by years of obscure work as a hack writer for the playhouses, adapting from the French, dramatizing novels, scribbling one-act curtain-raisers and all kinds of theatrical nondescripts. There is a long list of failures and half successes to

his account before he emerged, about 1885, with a series of three-act farces, "The Magistrate," "The Cabinet Minister," "The Schoolmistress" and the like, which pleased every one by their easy, natural style, their fresh invention, the rollicking fun that carried off their highly improbable entanglements, and the *bonhomie* and knowledge of the world with which comic character was observed and portrayed. Absurdity is the kingdom of farce; and, as in the topsyturvy world of *opera bouffe*, a great part of the effect in these plays is obtained by setting dignified persons, like prime ministers, cathedral deans and justices, to doing ludicrously incongruous actions. Thus, the schoolmistress, outwardly a very prim and proper gentlewoman, leads a double life, putting in her Christmas vacation as a *figurante* in comic opera; anticipating, and perhaps suggesting, Mr. Zangwill's "Serio-Comic Governess."

To these farces succeeded pieces in which social satire, sentimental comedy, and the comedy of character were mixed in varying proportions: "Sweet Lavender," "The Princess and the Butterfly," "Trelawney of the Wells," and others. Of these, the first was, perhaps, the favorite, and was translated and performed in several languages. It is a very winning play, with a genuine popular qual-

ity, though with a slight twist in its sentiment. Pinero's art has deepened in tone, until in such later work as "The Profligate," "The Benefit of the Doubt," "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," "The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith," and "Iris," he has dealt seriously, and sometimes tragically, with the nobler passions. His *chef d'oeuvre* in this kind, "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," is constructed with consummate skill, and its psychology is right and true. This is a problem play (it is unfortunate that we apply this term exclusively to plays dealing with one particular class of problems), and its ethical value, as well as its tragical force, lies in its demonstration of the truth that no one can escape from his past. The past will avenge itself upon him or her, not only in the unforeseen consequences of old misdeeds, but in that subtler nemesis, the deterioration of character which makes life under better conditions irksome and impossible. The catastrophe comes with the inevitableness of the old Greek fate-tragedies. In this instance, it is suicide, as in "Hedda Gabler" or Hauptmann's "*Vor Sonnenaufgang.*" Though criticised as melodramatic, the dramatist makes us feel it here to be the only solution. Mr. Pinero has already achieved the distinction of a "Pinero Birthday Book"; while "Arthur Wing Pinero: a Study," by H. Hamilton Fyfe, a

book of two hundred and fifty pages, with a bibliography, reviews his plays *seriatim.*

Without pushing the analogy too far, we may call Mr. Pinero and Mr. Bernard Shaw the Goldsmith and Sheridan of the modern stage. In Pinero, as in Goldsmith, humor more than wit is the prevailing impression. That "brilliancy" which is often so distressing is absent from his comedy, whose surfaces do not corruscate, but absorb the light softly. His satire is good-natured, his worldliness not hard, and his laughter is a neighbor to tears. Shaw is an Irishman, a journalistic free-lance and Socialist pamphleteer. He has published three collections of plays—"Pleasant," "Unpleasant," and "For Puritans"—accompanied with amusingly truculent prefaces, discussing, among other things, whether his pieces are "better than Shakespeare's." Two of his comedies, "Arms and the Man" and "The Devil's Disciple," were put on in New York by Mr. Mansfield as long ago, if I am right, as 1894 and 1897, respectively. "Arms and the Man" is an effective theatre piece, with a quick movement, ingenious misunderstandings, and several exciting moments. Like his fellow countryman, Sheridan, Mr. Shaw is clever in inventing situations, though he professes scorn of them as bits of old theatrical lumber, a concession to the pit. "Candida" was given

in America a season or two ago, and the problems of character which it proposes have been industriously discussed by the dramatic critics and by social circles everywhere. The author is reported to have been amused at this, and to have described his heroine as a most unprincipled woman—a view quite inconsistent with the key kindly afforded in the stage directions. These, in all Shaw's plays, are explicit and profuse, comprising details of costume, gesture, expression, the furniture and decorations of the scene, with full character analyses of the *dramatis personae* in the manner of Ben Jonson. The italicized portions of the printed play are little less important than the speeches; and small license of interpretation is left to the players. This is an extra-dramatic method, the custom of the novel overflowing upon the stage. But Mr. Shaw defends the usage and asks: "What would we not give for the copy of 'Hamlet' used by Shakespeare at rehearsal, with the original 'business' scrawled by the prompter's pencil? And if we had, in addition, the descriptive directions which the author gave on the stage: above all, the character sketches, however brief, by which he tried to convey to the actor the sort of person he meant him to incarnate! Well, we should have had all this if Shakespeare, instead of merely writing out his lines, had

prepared the plays for publication in competition with fiction as elaborate as that of Meredith." "I would give half a dozen of Shakespeare's plays for one of the prefaces he ought to have written."

Shaw's appeal has been more acutely intellectual than Pinero's, but his plays are less popular and less satisfying; while the critics, he complains, refuse to take him seriously. They treat him as an irresponsible Irishman with a genius for paradox, a puzzling way of going back on himself, and a freakish delight in mystifying the public. The heart interest in his plays is small. He has the Celtic subtlety, but not the Celtic sentiment; in this, too, resembling Sheridan, that wit rather than humor is the staple of his comedy—a wit which in both is employed in the service of satire upon sentiment. But the modern dramatist's satire cuts deeper and is more caustic. Lydia Languish and Joseph Surface, Sheridan's embodiments of romance and sentiment, are conceived superficially and belong to the comedy of manners, not of character. Sheridan would not have understood Lamb's saying that Charles Surface was the true canting hypocrite of "The School for Scandal." For nowadays sentiment and romance take less obvious shapes; and Shaw, who detests them both and holds

a retainer for realism, tests for them with finer reagents.

And here comes in the influence of Ibsen, perhaps the most noticeable foreign influence in the recent English drama, from which it has partly driven out the French, hitherto all-predominant. Ibsen's introduction to the English stage dates from 1889 and the years following, although Mr. Gosse's studies and the translations of Mr. Havelock Ellis and others had made a few of his plays known to the reader. As long since as 1880, a very free version of "A Doll's House," under the title "Breaking a Butterfly," had been made for the theatre by Mr. Henry Arthur Jones and a collaborator. The French critic, M. Augustin Filon, in his book, "The English Stage" (1897), ventures a guess that the Ibsen brand of realism will be found to agree better with the English character than the article furnished by Dumas *fils* and other French dramatists; and he even suggests the somewhat fantastic theory that an audience of the fellow countrymen of Darwin and Huxley will listen with a peculiar sympathy to such a play as "Ghosts," in which the doctrine of heredity is so forcibly preached. Ibsen's masterly construction, quite as much as his ideas, has been studied with advantage by our dramatists. Thus it is thought that Pinero, who has shown, in general, very little

of Ibsen's influence, may have taken a hint from him in the inconclusive ending of "The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith." The inconclusive ending is a practice—perhaps a principle—of the latest realistic schools of drama and fiction. Life, they contend, has no artificial closes, but flows continually on, and a play is only a "bleeding slice of life." In old tragedy, death is the end. "Troilus and Cressida" is Shakespeare's only episodical tragedy, the only one in which the protagonist is not killed—and, perhaps for that reason, the quarto title-page describes it as a comedy. But in Ibsenite drama the hero or heroine does not always die. Sometimes he or she goes away, or sometimes just accepts the situation and stays on. The sound of the door shutting in "A Doll's House" tells us that Nora has gone out into the world to begin a new career. In "Mrs. Warren's Profession," one of Shaw's strongest "Plays Unpleasant," —so unpleasant that its production on the boards was forbidden by the Lord Chamberlain,—when Vivie discovers what her mother's profession is, and where the money comes from that sent her to Newnham, she does nothing melodramatic, but simply utilizes her mathematical education by entering an actuary's office. The curtain falls to the stage direction, "Then she goes at her work with a

plunge, and soon becomes absorbed in her figures."

Shaw is a convinced Ibsenite and took up the foils for the master in a series of articles in the *Saturday Review* in 1895. The new woman, the emancipated woman so much in evidence in Ibsen, goes in and out through Shaw's plays, short-skirted, cigarette-smoking, a business woman with no nonsense about her, a good fellow, calling her girl friends by their last names and treating male associates with a brusque *camaraderie*. But, as he satirizes everything, himself included, he has his laugh at the Ibsen cult in "The Philanderer." There is an Ibsen Club, with a bust of the Norse divinity over the library mantelpiece. One of the rules is that no womanly woman is to be admitted. At the first symptom of womanliness, a woman forfeits her membership. What Shaw chiefly shares with Ibsen is his impatience of heroics, cant, social lies, respectable prejudices, the conventions of a traditional morality. Face facts, call things by their names, drag the skeleton out of the closet. Ibsen brushes these cobwebs aside with a grave logic and a savage contempt; he makes their hollow unreality the source of tragic wrong. But Shaw's lighter temperament is wholly that of the comic artist, and he attacks cant with the weapons of irony. His favorite characters are audacious, irrev-

erent young men and women, without illusions and incapable of being shocked, but delighting in shocking their elders. The clergy are the professional trustees of this conventional morality and are treated by Ibsen and Shaw with scant respect. Mrs. Alving in "Ghosts" shows the same contemptuous toleration of the scruples of the rabbit-like Parson Manders, as Candida shows for her clerical husband's preaching and phrase-making. The present season has witnessed the first appearance on the American stage of Mr. Shaw's gayest farce comedy, "You Never Can Tell."

I asked an actor, a university graduate, what he thought of the future of verse drama in acted plays. He inclined to believe that its day had gone by, even in tragedy; and that the language of the modern serious drama would be prose, colloquial, never stilted (as it was in "George Barnwell" and "Richelieu"), but rising, when necessary, into eloquence and a kind of unmetrical poetry. He instanced several passages in Pinero's "Sweet Lavender" and later plays. Still, the blank-verse tradition dies hard. Probably the leading representative of ideal or poetic drama in the contemporary theatre is Stephen Phillips, whose "Paolo and Francesca" (1899), "Herod" (1900), and "Ulysses" (1902) have all been shown upon

the boards and highly acclaimed, at least by the critics. There is no doubt that they are fine dramatic poems with many passages of delicate, and some of noble, beauty. But whether they are anything more than excellent closet drama is not yet proved. Mr. Phillips's experience as an actor has given him a practical knowledge of technic; and it may be conceded that his plays are nearer the requirements of the stage than Browning's or Tennyson's. They are simple, as Browning's are not; and they have quick movement, where Tennyson's are lumbering. Neither is it much against them that their subjects are antique, taken from Dante, Josephus, and Homer. But they appear to me poetically rather than dramatically imagined. Shakespeare and Racine dealt with remote or antique life; yet, each in his own way modernized and realized it. It is a hackneyed observation that Racine's Greeks, Romans, and Turks are French gentlemen and ladies of the court of Louis XIV. Shakespeare's Homeric heroes are very un-Homeric. There is little in either of local color or historical perspective: there is in both a fulness of handling, an explication of sentiments and characters. The people are able talkers and reasoners. Mr. Phillips's method is implicit, and the atmosphere of things old and foreign is kept, the distance

which lends enchantment to mediaeval Italy, or the later Roman Empire, or the heroic age. It is as if the "Idylls of the King" were dramatized,—as, indeed, "Elaine" was dramatized for one of the New York playhouses by George Lathrop,—retaining all their romantic charm and all their dramatic unreality.

Still, there are moments of genuine dramatic passion in all three of these plays: in "Herod," for instance, where Mariamne acknowledges to the tetrarch that her love for him is dead. And in "Ulysses," Telemachus's recognition of his father moves one very deeply, producing its impression, too, by a few speeches in a perfectly simple, unembroidered diction, by means properly scenic, not poetic like Tennyson's. "Ulysses" seems the best of Mr. Phillips's pieces, more loosely built than the others, but of more varied interest and more lifelike. The gods speak in rhyme and the human characters in blank verse, while some of the more familiar dialogue is in prose; Ctesippus, an elderly wooer of Penelope, is a comic figure; and there is a good deal of rough, natural fooling among the wooers, shepherds, and maids in the great hall of Ithaca. In its use of popular elements and its romantic freedom of handling, the play contrasts with Robert Bridges's "The Return of Ulysses," which

Mr. Yeats praises for its "classical gravity" and "lyric and meditative" quality. Mr. Phillips opens his scene on Calypso's island, and brings his wandering hero home only after making him descend to the shades. His Ulysses shoots the wooers in full view of the audience. In Mr. Bridges's play the action begins in Ithaca, the unities of time and place are observed, and so is dramatic decency. The wooers are slain outside, and their slaying is described to Penelope by a handmaid who sees it from the door. Yet, upon the whole, Mr. Phillips's constructive formula is more Sophoclean than Shakespearean. Not that he adheres to the external conventions of Attic tragedy, the chorus, the unities, etc., like Matthew Arnold in "Merope"; but that his plot evolution exhibits the straight, slender line of Sophocles, rather than the rich composite pattern of Elizabethan tragi-comedy. I have been told by some who saw "Ulysses" played, that the descent *ad inferos* was grotesque in effect. But "Paolo and Francesca" might have gained from an infusion of grotesque. D'Annunzio's almost precisely contemporary version of the immortal tale has just the solid, materialistic treatment which makes you feel the brutal realities of mediaeval life, the gross soil in which this "lily of Tartarus" found root. Mr. Phillips's latest piece, "The Sin of David," a tragedy

of Cromwell's England, is now in its first season.

Among the most interesting of recent dramatic contributions are William Bulter Yeats's "Plays for an Irish Theatre." Mr. Yeats's recent visit to this country is still fresh in recollection; and doubtless many of my readers have seen his beautiful little fairy piece, "The Land of Heart's Desire." Probably allegory, or at least symbolism, is the only form in which the supernatural has any chance in modern drama. The old-fashioned ghost is too robust an apparition to produce in a sceptical generation that "willing suspension of disbelief" which, says Coleridge, constitutes dramatic illusion. Hamlet's father talks too much; and the ghosts in "Richard III" are so sociable a company as to quite keep each other in countenance. The best ghost in Shakespeare is Banquo's, which is invisible—a mere "clot on the brain"—and has no "lines" to speak. The elves in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and the elemental spirits in "The Tempest" are nothing but machinery. The other world is not the subject of the play. Hauptmann's "*Die Versunkene Glocke*" is symbolism, and so is "The Land of Heart's Desire." Maeterlinck's "*Les Aveugles*" and Yeats's "Cathleen Ni Hoolihan" are more formally allegorical. The poor old woman, in the latter, who takes the bride-

groom from his bride, is Ireland, from whom strangers have taken her "four beautiful green fields"—the ancient kingdoms of Munster, Leinster, Ulster, and Connaught.

These Irish plays, indeed, are the nearest thing we have to the work of the Belgian symbolist, to dramas like "*Les Aveugles*" and "*L'Intruse.*" And, as in those, the people are peasants, and the dialogue is homely prose. No brogue: only a few idioms and sometimes not even that, the whole being supposed to be a translation from the Gaelic into standard English. Maeterlinck's dramas have been played on many theatres. Mr. William Sharp, who twice saw "*L'Intruse*" at Paris, found it much less impressive in the acting than in the reading, and his experience was not singular. As for the more romantic pieces, like "*Les Sept Princesses*" and "*Aglavaine et Sélysette,*" they are about as shadowy as one of Tieck's tales. Those who saw Mrs. Patrick Campbell in "*Pelléas et Mélisande*" will doubtless agree that these dreamlike poems are hurt by representation. It may be that Maeterlinck, like Baudelaire, has invented a new shudder. But the matinée audiences laughed at many things which had thrilled the closet reader.

Yeats's tragedies, like Maeterlinck's, belong to the *drame intime*, the *théâtre statique*. The popular drama—what Yeats calls

the "theatre of commerce"—is dynamic. The true theatre is the human will. Brunetière shows by an analysis of any one of Racine's plays—say "*Andromaque*"—how the action moves forward by a series of decisions. But Maeterlinck's people are completely passive: they suffer: they do not act, but are acted upon by the unearthly powers of which they are the sport. Yeats's plays, too, are "plays for marionettes," spectral puppet-shows of the Celtic twilight. True, his characters do make choices: the young wife in "The Land of Heart's Desire," the bridegroom in "Cathleen Ni Hoolihan" make choices, but their apparently free will is supernaturally influenced. The action is in two worlds. In antique tragedy, too, man is notoriously the puppet of fate; but, though he acts in ignorance of the end to which destiny is shaping his deed, he acts with vigorous self-determination. There is nothing dreamlike about Orestes or Oedipus or Antigone.

It is said that the plays of another Irishman, Oscar Wilde, are now great favorites in Germany: "Salome," in particular, and "Lady Windermere's Fan" and "A Woman of No Importance" ("*Eine unbedeutende Frau*"). This is rather surprising in the case of the last two, which are society dramas with little action and an excess of cynical wit in the dialogue. It is hard to understand how

the unremitting fire of repartee, paradox, and "reversed epigram" in such a piece as "Lady Windermere's Fan," the nearest recent equivalent of Congreve comedy—can survive translation or please the German public.

This "new drama" is very new indeed. In 1882, William Archer, the translator of Ibsen, published his book, "English Dramatists of To-day," in the introduction to which he acknowledged that the English literary drama did not exist. "I should like to see in England," he wrote, "a body of playwrights whose works are not only acted, but printed and *read*." Nine years later, Henry Arthur Jones, in the preface to his printed play, "Saints and Sinners," denied that there was any relation between English literature and the modern English drama. A few years later still, in his introduction to the English translation of M. Filon's book, "The English Stage" (1897), Mr. Jones is more hopeful. "If any one will take the trouble," he writes, "to examine the leading English plays of the last ten years, and will compare them with the serious plays of our country during the last three centuries, I shall be mistaken if he will not find evidence of the beginnings of an English drama of greater import and vitality, and of wider aim, than any school of

drama the English theatre has known since the Elizabethans."

In his book on "The Renaissance of the Drama," and in many other places, Mr. Jones has pleaded for a theatre which should faithfully reflect contemporary life; and in his own plays he has endeavored to furnish examples of what such a drama should be. His first printed piece, "Saints and Sinners" (exhibited in 1884), was hardly literature, and did not stamp its author as a first-class talent. It is a seduction play of the familiar type, with a set of stock characters: the villain; the forsaken maid; the steadfast lover who comes back from Australia with a fortune in the nick of time; the *père noble*, a country clergyman straight out of "The Vicar of Wakefield"; and a pair of hypocritical deacons in a dissenting chapel—very much overdone, *pace* Matthew Arnold, who complimented Mr. Jones on those concrete examples of middle-class Philistinism, with its alliterative mixture of business and bethels. Mr. Jones, like Mr. Shaw, is true to the tradition of the stage in being fiercely anti-Puritan, and wastes many words in his prefaces in vindicating the right of the theatre to deal with religious hypocrisy; as if Tartuffe and Tribulation Wholesome had not been familiar comedy heroes for nearly three hundred years!

This dramatist served his apprenticeship in melodrama, as Pinero did in farce; and there are signs of the difference in his greater seriousness, or heaviness. Indeed, an honest feeling and an earnest purpose are among his best qualities. M. Filon thinks him the most English of contemporary writers for the stage. And, as Pinero's art has gained in depth, Jones's has gained in lightness. Crude at first, without complexity or shading in his character-drawing, without much art in comic dialogue or much charm and distinction in serious, he has advanced steadily in grasp and skill and sureness of touch, and stands to-day in the front rank of modern British dramatists. "The Crusaders," "The Case of Rebellious Susan," "The Masqueraders," "Judah," "The Liars," are all good plays—or, at least plays with good features—and certainly fall within the line which divides literary drama from the mere stage play. "Judah," for instance, is a solidly built piece, with two or three strong situations. The heroine is a fasting girl and miraculous healer, a subject of a kind which Hawthorne often chose; or reminding one of Mr. Howells's charlatans in "The Undiscovered Country" and Mr. James's in "The Bostonians." The characterization of the leading persons is sound, and there is a brace of very diverting broad comedy figures, a

male and a female scientific prig. They are slightly caricatured—Jones is still a little heavy-handed—but the theatre must over-accentuate now and again, just as actresses must rouge.

In this play and in "The Crusaders," social satire is successfully essayed at the expense of prevailing fads, such as fashionable philanthropy, slumming parties, neighborhood guilds, and the like. There is a woman in "The Crusaders,"—a campaigner, a steamboat, a specimen of the loud, energetic, public, organizing, speech-making, committee and platform, subscription-soliciting woman,—nearly as good as anything in our best fiction. Mr. Joseph Knight, who writes a preface to "Judah" (first put on at the Shaftesbury Theatre, London, 1890), compares its scientific faddists with the women who swarm to chemistry and biology lectures in that favorite Parisian comedy, "*Le monde où l'on s'ennuie.*" There is capital satire of the downright kind in these plays, but surely it is dangerous to suggest comparison with the gay irony, the courtly grace, the dash and sparkle of Pailleron's little masterpiece. There are no such winged shafts in any English quiver. Upon the whole, "The Liars" seems to me the best comedy of Mr. Jones's that I have read,—I have not read them all,—the most evenly sustained at

every point of character and incident, a fine piece of work in both invention and construction. The subject, however, is of that disagreeable variety which the English drama has so often borrowed from the French, the rescue of a married woman from a compromising position, by a comic conspiracy in her favor.

The Puritans have always been half-way right in their opposition to the theatre. The drama, in the abstract and as a form of literature, is of an ancient house and a noble. But the professional stage tends naturally to corruption, and taints what it receives. The world pictured in these contemporary society plays—or in many of them—we are unwilling to accept as typical. Its fashion is fast and not seldom vulgar. It is a vicious democracy in which divorces are frequent and the "woman with a past" is the usual heroine; in which rowdy peers mingle oddly with manicurists, clairvoyants, barmaids, adventuresses, comic actresses, faith-healers, etc., and the contact between high life and low life has commonly disreputable motives. Surely this is not English life, as we know it from the best English fiction. And, if the drama is to take permanent rank with the novel, it must redistribute its emphasis.

SHERIDAN

WITH the exception of Goldsmith's comedy, "She Stoops to Conquer," the only eighteenth century plays that still keep the stage are Sheridan's three, "The Rivals," "The Critic," and "The School for Scandal." Once in a while, to be sure, a single piece by one or another of Goldsmith's and Sheridan's contemporaries makes a brief reappearance in the modern theatre. I have seen Goldsmith's earlier and inferior comedy, "The Good-natured Man," as well as Towneley's farce, "High Life Below Stairs," both given by amateurs; and I have seen Colman's "Heir at Law" (1797) acted by professionals. Doubtless other eighteenth century plays, such as Cumberland's "West Indian" and Holcroft's "Road to Ruin," are occasionally revived and run for a few nights. Sometimes this happens even to an earlier piece, such as Farquhar's "Beaux' Stratagem" (1707), which retained its popularity all through the eighteenth century. But things of this sort, though listened to with a certain respectful attention, are plainly tolerated as interesting literary survivals, like

an old miracle or morality play, say the "*Secunda Pastorum*" or "Everyman," revisiting the glimpses of the moon. They do not belong to the repertoire.

Sheridan's plays, on the other hand, have never lost their popularity as acting dramas. "The School for Scandal" has been played oftener than any other English play outside of Shakespeare; and "The Rivals" is not far behind it. Even "The Critic," which is a burlesque and depends for its effect not upon plot and character but upon the sheer wit of the dialogue and the absurdity of the situations—even "The Critic" continues to be presented both at private theatricals and upon the public stage, and seldom fails to amuse. There is no better proof of Sheridan's extraordinary dramatic aptitude than is afforded by a comparison of "The Critic" with its model, Buckingham's "Rehearsal." To Boswell's question why "The Rehearsal" was no longer played, Dr. Johnson answered, "Sir, it had not wit enough to keep it sweet"; then paused and added in good Johnsonese, "it had not vitality sufficient to preserve it from putrefaction." "The Rehearsal" did have plenty of wit, but it was of the kind which depends for its success upon a knowledge of the tragedies it burlesqued. These are forgotten, and so "The Rehearsal" is dead. But "The Critic" is not only very

much brighter, but it satirizes high tragedy in general and not a temporary literary fashion or a particular class of tragedy: and, therefore, nearly a century and a half after its first performance, "The Critic" is still very much alive. The enduring favor which Sheridan's plays have won must signify one of two things: either that they touch the springs of universal comedy, *la comédie humaine*—the human comedy, as Balzac calls it: go down to the deep source of laughter, which is also the fountain of tears; or else that, whatever of shallowness or artificiality their picture of life may have, their cleverness and artistic cunning are such that they keep their freshness after one hundred and fifty years. Such is the antiseptic power of art.

The latter, I think, is Sheridan's case. His quality was not genius, but talent, yet talent raised to a very high power. His comedy lacks the depth and mellowness of the very greatest comedy. His place is not among the supreme creative humorists, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Aristophanes, Molière. Taine says that in Sheridan all is brilliant, but that the metal is not his own, nor is it always of the best quality. Yet he acknowledges the wonderful vivacity of the dialogue, and the animated movement of every scene and of the play as a whole. Sheridan, in truth, was

inventive rather than original. His art was eclectic, derivative, but his skill in putting together his materials was unfailing. He wrote the comedy of manners: not the comedy of character. In the greatest comedy, in "The Merchant of Venice," or "*Le Misanthrope*," or "Peer Gynt" there is poetry, or at least there is seriousness. But in the comedy of manners, or in what is called classical comedy, i.e., pure, unmixed comedy, the purpose is merely to amuse.

He never drives his plowshare through the crust of good society into the substratum of universal ideas. We are not to look in the comedy of manners for wisdom and far-reaching thoughts; nor yet for profound, vital, subtle studies of human nature. Sheridan's comedies are the sparkling foam on the crest of the wave: the bright, consummate flower of high life: finished specimens of the playwright's art: not great dramatic works.

Yet when all deductions have been made, Sheridan's is a most dazzling figure. The brilliancy and versatility of his talents were indeed amazing. Byron said: "Whatsoever Sheridan has done, or chosen to do, has been *par excellence* always the best of its kind. He has written the best comedy, the best drama, the best farce and the best address; and, to crown all, delivered the very best oration ever conceived or heard in this country."

By the best comedy Byron means "The School for Scandal"; the best drama was "The Duenna," an opera or music drama; the best address was the monologue on Garrick; and the best oration was the famous speech on the Begums of Oude in the impeachment proceedings against Warren Hastings: a speech which held the attention of the House of Commons for over five hours at a stretch, and was universally acknowledged to have outdone the most eloquent efforts of Burke and Pitt and Fox.

Sheridan came naturally by his aptitude for the theatre. His father was an actor and declamation master and had been manager of the Theatre Royal in Dublin. His mother had written novels and plays. Her unfinished comedy, "A Journey to Bath," furnished a few hints towards "The Rivals," the scene of which, you will remember, is at Bath, the fashionable watering place which figures so largely in eighteenth century letters: in Smollett's novel, "Humphrey Clinker," in Horace Walpole's correspondence, in Anstey's satire, "The New Bath Guide," and in Goldsmith's life of Beau Nash, the King of the Pump-room. Histrionic and even dramatic ability has been constantly inherited. There are families of actors, like the Kembles and the Booths; and it is noteworthy how large a proportion of our dramatic authors have

been actors, or in practical touch with the stage: Marlowe, Greene, Jonson, Shakespeare, Otway, Lee, Cibber, the Colmans, father and son, Macklin, Garrick, Foote, Knowles, Boucicault, Robertson, Tom Taylor, Pinero, Stephen Phillips. These names by no means exhaust the list of those who have both written and acted plays. Sheridan's career was full of adventure. He eloped from Bath with a beautiful girl of eighteen, a concert singer, daughter of Linley, the musical composer, and was married to her in France. In the course of this affair he fought two duels, in one of which he was dangerously wounded. Now what can be more romantic than a duel and an elopement? Yet notice how the identical adventures which romance uses in one way, classical comedy uses in quite another. These personal experiences doubtless suggested some of the incidents in "The Rivals"; but in that comedy the projected duel and the projected elopement end in farce, and common sense carries it over romance, which it is the whole object of the play to make fun of, as it is embodied in the person of Miss Lydia Languish.

It was Sheridan who said that easy writing was sometimes very hard reading. Nevertheless, whatever he did had the air of being dashed off carelessly. All his plays

were written before he was thirty. He was a man of the world, who was only incidentally a man of letters. He sat thirty years in the House of Commons, was Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs under Fox, and Secretary to the Treasury under the coalition ministry. He associated intimately with that royal fribble, the Prince Regent, and the whole dynasty of dandies, and became, as Thackeray said of his forerunner, Congreve, a tremendous swell, but on a much slenderer capital. It is one of the puzzles of Sheridan's biography where he got the money to pay for Drury Lane Theatre, of which he became manager and lessee. He was a shining figure in the world of sport and the world of politics, as well as in the world of literature and the drama. He had the sanguine, improvident temperament, and the irregular, procrastinating habits of work which are popularly associated with genius. The story is told that the fifth act of "The School for Scandal" was still unwritten while the earlier acts were being rehearsed for the first performance; and that Sheridan's friends locked him up in a room with pen, ink, and paper, and a bottle of claret, and would not let him out till he had finished the play. This anecdote is not, I believe, authentic; but it shows the current impression of his irresponsible ways. His reckless expenses, his betting and gam-

bling debts resulted in his arrest and imprisonment, and writs were served upon him in his last illness. I do not think that Sheridan affected a contempt for the profession of letters; but there was perhaps a touch of affectation in his rather *dégagé* attitude toward his own performances. It is an attitude not uncommon in literary men who are also—like Congreve—"tremendous swells." "I hate your authors who are *all* author," wrote Byron, who was himself a bit of a snob. When Voltaire called upon Congreve, the latter disclaimed the character of author, and said he was merely a private gentleman, who wrote for his own amusement. "If you were merely a private gentleman," replied Voltaire, "I would not have thought it worth while to come to see you."

Dramatic masterpieces are not tossed off lightly from the nib of the pen; and doubtless Sheridan worked harder at his plays than he chose to have the public know and was not really one of that "mob of gentlemen who write with ease" at whom Pope sneers. Byron and many others testify to the coruscating wit of his conversation; and it is well known that he did not waste his good things, but put them down in his notebooks and worked them up to a high polish in the dialogue of his plays. It is noticeable how thriftily he leads up to his jokes, laying little

traps for his speakers to fall into. Thus in "The Rivals," where Faulkland is complaining to Captain Absolute about Julia's heartless high spirits in her lover's absence, he appeals to his friend to mark the contrast:

"Why Jack, have *I* been the joy and spirit of the company?"

"No, indeed, you have not," acknowledges the Captain.

"Have *I* been lively and entertaining?" asks Faulkland.

"O, upon my word, I acquit you," answers his friend.

"Have *I* been full of wit and humor?" pursues the jealous lover.

"No, faith, to do you justice," says Absolute, "you have been confoundedly stupid."

The Captain could hardly have missed this rejoinder; it was fairly put into his mouth by the wily dramatist.

Again observe how carefully the way is prepared for the repartee in the following bit of dialogue from "The School for Scandal": Sir Peter Teazle has married a country girl and brought her up to London, where she shows an unexpected zest for the pleasures of the town. He is remonstrating with her about her extravagance and fashionable ways.

Sir Peter: "Madam, I pray had you any of

these elegant expenses when you married me?"

Lady Teazle: "Lud, Sir Peter, would you have me be out of the fashion?"

Sir Peter: "The fashion indeed! What had you to do with the fashion before you married me?"

Lady Teazle: "For my part—I should think you would like to have your wife thought a woman of taste."

Sir Peter: "Aye, there again—Taste! Zounds, Madam, you had no taste when you married me."

The retort is inevitable and a modern playwriter—say, Shaw or Pinero—would leave the audience to make it, Lady Teazle answering merely with an ironical bow. But Sheridan was not addressing subtle intellects, and he doesn't let us off from the lady's answer in good blunt terms: "That's very true indeed, Sir Peter! After having married you I should never pretend to taste again, I allow." But why expose these tricks of the trade? All playwrights have them, and Sheridan uses them very cleverly, if rather transparently. Another time-honored stage convention which Sheridan practises is the labelling of his characters. Names like Malaprop, O'Trigger, Absolute, Languish, Acres, etc., are descriptive; and the realist might ask how their owners came by them, if he were pedantic

enough to cross-question the innocent old comedy tradition, which is of course unnatural and indefensible enough if we choose to take such things seriously.

About the comparative merits of Sheridan's two best plays, tastes have differed. "The Rivals" has more of humor; "The School for Scandal" more of wit; but both have plenty of each. On its first appearance, January 17, 1775, "The Rivals" was a failure, owing partly to its excessive length, partly to bad acting, partly to a number of outrageous puns and similar witticisms which the author afterwards cut out, and partly to the offense given by the supposed caricature of an Irish gentleman in the person of Sir Lucius O'Trigger. Sheridan withdrew the play and revised it thoroughly, shortening the acting time by an hour and redistributing the parts among the members of the Covent Garden Theatre company. At is second performance, eleven days later, it proved a complete success, and has remained so ever since. It has always been a favorite play with the actors, because it offers so many fine rôles to an all-star company. It affords at least four first-class parts to the comic artist: Sir Anthony Absolute, Mrs. Malaprop, Bob Acres, and Sir Lucius O'Trigger: while it has an unusually spirited *jeune premier*, a charming though utterly

unreasonable heroine, a good soubrette in Lucy, and entertaining minor characters in Fag and David.

As we have no manuscript of the first draft of "The Rivals," it is impossible to say exactly what changes the author made in it. But as the text now stands it is hard to understand why Sir Lucius O'Trigger was regarded as an insult to the Irish nation. Sheridan was an Irishman and he protested that he would have been the last man to lampoon his compatriots. Sir Lucius is a fortune hunter, indeed, and he is always spoiling for a fight; but he is a gentleman and a man of courage; and even in his fortune hunting he is sensitive upon the point of honor: he will get Mrs. Malaprop's consent to his addresses to her niece, and "do everything fairly," for, as he says very finely, "I am so poor that I can't afford to do a dirty action." The comedy Irishman was nothing new in Sheridan's time. He goes back to Jonson and Shakespeare. In the eighteenth century his name was Teague; in the nineteenth, Pat or Mike. We are familiar with this stock figure of the modern stage, his brogue, his long-skirted coat and knee breeches, the blackthorn shillalah in his fist and the dudeen stuck into his hatband. The Irish naturally resent this grotesque: their history has been tragical and they wish to be taken

seriously. We have witnessed of late their protest against one of their own comedies, "The Playboy of the Western World." But perhaps they have become over touchy. There is not any too much fun in the world, and if we are to lose all the funny national peculiarities from caricature and farce and dialect story, if the stage Irishman has got to go, and also the stage Yankee, Dutchman, Jew, Ole Olsen, John Bull, and the burnt cork artist of the negro minstrel show, this world will be a gloomier place. Be that as it may, Sir Lucius O'Trigger is no caricature: he doesn't even speak in brogue, and perhaps the nicest stroke in his portrait is that innocent inconsequence which is the essence of an Irish bull. "Hah, my little ambassadress," he says to Lucy, with whom he has an appointment, "I have been looking for you; I have been on the South Parade this half hour."

"O gemini!" cries Lucy, "and I have been waiting for your worship on the North."

"Faith," answers Sir Lucius, "maybe that was the reason we did not meet."

A great pleasure in the late sixties and early seventies used to be the annual season of English classical comedy at Wallack's old playhouse; and not the least pleasant feature of this yearly revival was the performance of "The Rivals," with John Gilbert cast for the part of Sir Anthony, Mrs. Gilbert as

Mrs. Malaprop, and Lester Wallack himself, if I remember rightly, in the rôle of the Captain. But, of course, the comic hero of the piece is Bob Acres; and this, I think, was Jefferson's great part. I saw him three times in Bob Acres, at intervals of years, and it was a masterpiece of high comedy acting: so natural, so utterly without consciousness of the presence of spectators, that it was less like acting than like the thing itself. The interpretation of the character, too, was so genial and sympathetic that one was left with a feeling of great friendliness toward the unwarlike Bob, and his cowardice excited not contempt but only amusement. The last time that I saw Joe Jefferson in "The Rivals," he was a very old man, and there was a pathetic impression of fatigue about his performance, though the refinement and the warm-heartedness with which he carried the part had lost nothing with age.

Historically Sheridan's plays represent a reaction against sentimental comedy, which had held the stage for a number of years, beginning, perhaps, with Steele's "Tender Husband (1703) and numbering, among its triumphs, pieces like Moore's "Foundling" (1748), Kelly's "False Delicacy," and several of Cumberland's plays. Cumberland, by the way, who was intensely jealous of Sheridan, was the original of Sir Fretful Plagiary in

"The Critic," Sheridan's only condescension to personal satire. He was seemingly a vain and pompous person, and well deserved his castigation. The story is told of Cumberland that he took his children to see "The School for Scandal" and when they laughed rebuked them, saying that he saw nothing to laugh at in this comedy. When this was reported to Sheridan, his comment was, "I think that confoundedly ungrateful, for I went to see Cumberland's last tragedy and laughed heartily at it all the way through."

With Goldsmith and Sheridan gayety came back to the English stage. In their prefaces and prologues both of them complain that the comic muse is dying and is being succeeded by "a mawkish drab of spurious breed who deals in sentimentals," genteel comedy, to wit, who comes from France where comedy has now become so very elevated and sentimental that it has not only banished humor and Molière from the stage, but it has banished all spectators too. Goldsmith laments the disgusting solemnity that had lately infected literature and sneers at the moralizing comedies that deal with the virtues and distresses of private life instead of ridiculing its faults. Joseph Surface in "The School for Scandal" is Sheridan's portrait of the sentimental, moralizing hypocrite, whose catchword is "the man of sentiment"; and whose

habit of uttering lofty moralities is so ingrained that he vents them even when no one is present who can be deceived by them.

Surface: "The man who does not share in the distresses of a brother—even though merited by his own misconduct—deserves—"

"O Lud," interrupts Lady Sneerwell, "you are going to be moral, and forget that you are among friends."

"Egad, that's true," rejoins Joseph, "I'll keep that sentiment till I see Sir Peter."

"The Critic" has a slap or two at sentimental comedy. A manuscript play has been submitted to Mr. Dangle, who reads this stage direction, "*Bursts into tears and exit,*" and naturally asks, "What is this, a tragedy?" "No," explains Mr. Sneer, "that's a genteel comedy, not a translation—only taken from the French: it is written in a style which they have lately tried to run down; the true sentimental and nothing ridiculous in it from the beginning to the end. . . . The theatre, in proper hands, might certainly be made the school of morality; but now, I am sorry to say it, people seem to go there principally for their entertainment." Another of these moral comedies is entitled "'The Reformed Housebreaker' where, by the mere force of humour, housebreaking is put in so ridiculous a light, that if the piece

has its proper run . . . bolts and bars will be entirely useless by the end of the season."

Sheridan has often been called the English Beaumarchais. The comedies of Beaumarchais, "The Barber of Seville" and "The Marriage of Figaro" were precisely contemporaneous with Sheridan's, and, like the latter, they were a reaction against sentimentalism, against the so-called *comédie larmoyante* or tearful comedies of La Chaussée and other French dramatists. With Beaumarchais laughter and mirth returned once more to the French stage. He goes back for a model to Molière, as Sheridan goes back to English Restoration comedy, and particularly to Congreve, whom he resembles in the wit of his dialogue and the vivacity of his character painting, but whom he greatly excels in the invention of plot and situation. Congreve's plots are intricate and hard to follow, highly improbable and destitute of climaxes. On the other hand, Sheridan is a master of plot. The duel scene in "The Rivals," the auction scene and the famous screen scene in "The School for Scandal" are three of the most skilfully managed situations in English comedy. Congreve's best play, "The Way of the World" (1700), was a failure on the stage. But whatever Sheridan's shortcomings, a want of practical effectiveness, of acting quality, was never one of them. Sheri-

dan revived society drama, what Lamb called the artificial comedy of the seventeenth century. Lydia Languish, with her romantic notions, and Mrs. Malaprop with her "nice derangement of epitaphs" are artificial characters. Bob Acres is for the most part delightfully natural, but his system of referential or sentimental swearing—"Odds blushes and blooms" and the like—is an artificial touch. The weakest feature of "The Rivals" is the underplot, the love affairs of Faulkland and Julia. Faulkland's particular variety of jealousy is a "humor" of the Ben Jonsonian sort, a sentimental alloy, as Charles Lamb pronounced it, and anyway infinitely tiresome. In modern acting versions this business is usually abridged. As Jefferson played it, Julia's part was cut out altogether, and Faulkland makes only one appearance (Act II, Scene I), where his presence is necessary for the going on of the main action.

There is one particular in which Congreve and Sheridan sin alike. They make all the characters witty. "Tell me if Congreve's fools are fools indeed," wrote Pope. And Sheridan can never resist the temptation of putting clever sayings into the mouths of simpletons. The romantic Miss Languish is nearly as witty as the very unromantic Lady Teazle. I need not quote the good things that

Fag and Lucy say, but Thomas the coachman, and the stupid old family servant David say things equally good. It is David, e.g., who, when his master remarks that if he is killed in the duel his honor will follow him to the grave, rejoins, "Now that's just the place where I could make shift to do without it." Sir Anthony is witty, Bob Acres himself is witty, and even Mrs. Malaprop—foolish old woman—delivers repartees. Mrs. Malaprop's verbal blunders, by the way, are a good instance of that artificial high polish so characteristic of Sheridan's art. There are people in earlier comedies who make ludicrous misapplications of words—Shakespeare's Dogberry, e.g., or Dame Quickly, but they do it naturally and occasionally. Sheridan reduces these accidents to a system—a science. No one in real life was ever so perseveringly and so brilliantly wrong as Mrs. Malaprop.

Dramatically this is out of character and is, therefore, a fault, though a fault easy to forgive since it results in so much clever talk. It is a fault, as I have said, which Congreve shares with Sheridan, his heir and continuator. Perhaps the lines of character are not cut quite so deep in Sheridan as in Congreve nor has his dialogue the elder dramatist's condensed, epigrammatic solidity. But

on the whole, "The Rivals" and "The School for Scandal" are better plays than Congreve ever wrote.

THE POETRY OF THE CAVALIERS

THE spirit of the seventeenth century Cavaliers has been made familiar to us by historians and romancers, but it did not find very adequate expression in contemporary verse. There are two perfect songs by Lovelace, "To Althea from Prison" and "To Lucasta, on Going to the Wars." But if we look into collections like Charles Mackay's "Songs of the Cavaliers," we are disappointed. These consist mainly of political campaign songs little removed from doggerel, satires by Butler and Cleveland, and rollicking ballad choruses by Alexander Brome, Sir Roger L'Estrange, Sir Richard Fanshawe, who was Prince Rupert's secretary; or haply by that gallant royalist gentleman, Arthur Lord Capel, executed, though a prisoner of war, after the surrender of Colchester. You may remember Milton's sonnet "To the Lord General Fairfax at the Siege of Colchester." These were the marks of a Cavalier ballad: to abuse the Roundheads, to be convivial and profane, to profess a reckless daring in fight, devotion to the

ladies, and loyalty to church and king. The gay courage of the Cavalier contrasted itself with the grim and stubborn valor of the Roundhead. The bitterest drop in the cup of the defeated kingsmen was that they were beaten by their social inferiors, by muckers and religious fanatics who cropped their hair, wore narrow bands instead of lace collars, and droned long prayers through their noses; people like the butcher Harrison and the leather seller, Praise-God Barebones, and the brewers, cobblers, grocers and like mechanical trades who figured as the preachers in Cromwell's New Model army. The usual commonplaces of anti-Puritan satire, the alleged greed and hypocrisy of the despised but victorious faction, their ridiculous solemnity, their illiteracy, contentiousness, superstition, and hatred of all liberal arts, are duly set forth in such pieces as "The Anarchie," "The Geneva Ballad," and "Hey then, up go we." The most popular of all these was the famous song, "When the King enjoys his own again," which Ritson indeed calls—but surely with much exaggeration—the most famous song of any time or country.

> And though today we see Whitehall
> With cobwebs hung around the wall,
> Yet Heaven shall make amends for all
> When the King enjoys his own again.

But somehow the finer essence of the Cavalier spirit escapes us in these careless verses. Better are the recorded sayings in prose of many gallant gentlemen in the King's service. There, for instance, was Sir Edmund Verney, the royal standard bearer who was killed at Edgehill. He was offered his life by a throng of his enemies if he would deliver the standard. He answered that his life was his own, but the standard was his and their sovereign's and he would not deliver it while he lived. At the outbreak of the war he had said to Hyde: "I have eaten his [the King's] bread and served him near thirty years, and will not do so base a thing as to forsake him; I choose rather to lose my life—which I am sure to do—to preserve and defend those things which are against my conscience to preserve and defend; for I will deal freely with you: I have no reverence for bishops for whom this quarrel subsists."

And there was that high-hearted nobleman, the Marquis of Winchester, whose fortress of Basing House, with its garrison of five hundred men and their families, held out for years against the Parliament. It was continuously besieged from July, 1643, to November, 1645, and at one time Sir William Waller attacked it in vain, with a force of seven thousand. At last Cromwell took it by storm, whereupon the Marquis, made pris-

oner, "broke out and said that if the King had no more ground in England but Basing House, he would adventure as he did, and so maintain it to the uttermost; comforting himself in this disaster that Basing House was called Loyalty." The sack of this great stronghold yielded over 200,000 pounds, and Clarendon says that on its every window-pane was written with a diamond point "*Aimez Loyauté.*"

The Cavalier spirit prolonged itself down into the Jacobite songs of the eighteenth century which centre about the two attempts of the Stuarts to regain their crown—in 1715 and in "the Forty-five."

> It was a' for our rightfu' King
> That we left fair Scotland's strand:
> It was a' for our rightfu' King
> That we e'er saw Irish land.
> He turned his charger as he spake
> Beside the river shore:
> He gave his bridle rein a shake,
> Cried "Adieu for evermore, my love;
> Adieu for evermore."

The Hanoverians have been good enough constitutional monarchs but without much appeal to the imagination. "I never can think of that German fellow as King of England," says Harry Warrington in "The Virginians," who has just been snubbed by

George II, the sovereign who hated "boetry and bainting." The Stuarts were bad kings, but they managed to inspire a passionate loyalty in their adherents, a devotion which went proudly into battle, into exile, and onto the scaffold: which followed them through their misfortunes and survived their final downfall. They were a native, or at least a Scottish dynasty; and Scotland, though upon the whole Presbyterian in religion and Whiggish in politics, was most tenacious of the Jacobite tradition. Consider the loss to British romance if the Stuarts had never reigned and sinned and suffered! Half of the Waverley novels and all the royalist songs, from Lovelace toasting in prison "the sweetness, mercy, majesty, and glories of his King," down to Burns's "Lament for Culloden" and the secret healths to "Charlie over the water." Three centuries divide Chastelard, dying for Mary Stuart, from Walter Scott, paralytic, moribund, standing by the tomb of the Young Pretender in St. Peter's and murmuring to himself of "Charlie and his men." Nay, is there not even to-day a White Rose Society which celebrates yearly the birthday of St. Charles, the martyr: some few score gentlemen with their committees, organs, propaganda, still bent on dethroning the Hanoverians and bringing in some remote collateral descendant? thinnest

ghost of legitimism, walking in the broad sunlight of the twentieth century, under the nose of crown and parliament, disregarded of all men except, here and there, a writer of humorous paragraphs for the newspapers?

For the passion of loyalty is extinct—extinct as the dodo. It was not patriotism, as we know it; nor was it the personal homage paid to great men, to the Cromwells, Washingtons, Bonapartes, and Bismarcks. It was a loyalty to the king as king, to a symbol, a fetich whom divinity doth hedge. In the political creed of the Stuarts, such homage was a prerogative of the crown, and right royally did they exact it, accepting all sacrifices and repaying them with neglect, ingratitude, and betrayal. Yes, loyalty is obsolete, and the Stuarts were unworthy of it. But no matter, it was a fine old passion.

After all, one of the finest things ever said of Charles I was said by a political opponent, the poet Andrew Marvell, Milton's assistant in the secretaryship for foreign tongues, when speaking of the King's dignified behavior upon the scaffold, he wrote:—

> He nothing common did or mean,
> Upon that memorable scene
> But, with his keener eye,
> The axe's edge did try;
> Nor called the gods, with vulgar spite,

To vindicate his helpless right,
But bowed his comely head
Down as upon a bed.

The Cavalier stood for the church as well as for the king, but he was not commonly a deeply religious man. The church poetry of that generation is often sweetly or fervently devout, but it was written mostly by clergymen, like George Herbert or Herrick—a rather worldly parson: now and then by a college recluse, like Crashaw—who became a Roman Catholic priest; or sometimes by a layman like Vaughan—who was a doctor; or Francis Quarles, whose gloomy religious verses have little to distinguish them from Puritan poetry. These poets were royalists but hardly Cavaliers. The real Cavaliers, the courtly and secular poets like Suckling, Lovelace, Cleveland, and the rest, stood for the church for social reasons. It was the church of their class, ancient, conservative, aristocratic. Carlyle, of Scotch Presbyterian antecedents, speaks disrespectfully of the English Church, "with its singular old rubrics and its four surplices at All-hallowtide," and describes the Hampton Court Conference of 1604 as "decent ceremonialism facing awful, devout Puritanism." Charles II tried to persuade the Scotch Earl of Lauderdale to become an Episcopalian,

assuring him that Presbyterianism was no religion for a gentleman. Says the spirit in Dipsychus:—

> The Church of England I belong to
> And think dissenters not far wrong too;
> They're vulgar dogs, but for his *creed*
> I hold that no man will be d—d.

The Cavalier was the inheritor of the mediaeval knight and the forerunner of the modern gentleman. To the stern Puritan conscience he opposed, as his guiding motive, the knightly sense of honor, a sort of artificial or aristocratic conscience. The Puritan looked upon himself as an instrument of the divine will. He acted as ever in his great taskmaster's eye: his sword was the sword of the Lord and of Gideon. Hence his sturdy, sublime courage. You cannot lick a Calvinist who knows that God is with him. But honor is not so much a regard for God as for oneself—a finer kind of self-respect. Inferior in momentum to the Puritan's sense of duty, there is something gallant and chivalrous about it. The Cavalier spirit was not so grave as the knight's. Though he fought for church and king, there was lacking the vow of knighthood, the religious dedication of oneself to the service of the cross and of one's feudal suzerain. But you notice how the Cavalier, like the knight, relates his honor to

the service of his lady. Lovelace's famous lines:—

> I could not love thee, dear, so much,
> Loved I not honour more,

may stand for the Cavalier motto.

Like the knight, the chevalier of the Middle Ages, the seventeenth century Cavalier too, as his name implies, was a horseman. Rupert's cavalry was the strongest arm of the King's service. Prince Rupert or Ruprecht, the nephew of the King, was the son of that Elizabeth Stuart, nicknamed the Queen of Hearts, whom Sir Henry Wotton celebrated in his lofty lines "On his Mistress, the Queen of Bohemia,"

> You meaner beauties of the night
> That poorly satisfy our eyes,
> More by your number than your light;
> You common people of the skies;
> What are you when the moon shall rise?

The impetuous charges of Rupert's cavalry won the day at Edgehill and all but won it at Marston Moor. But they were an undisciplined troop and much given to plunder—a German word, by the way, which Prince Rupert introduced into England. Perhaps you have seen the once popular engraving entitled "The Cavalier's Pets." A noble staghound is guarding a pair of riding boots, a

pair of gauntlets, a pair of cavalry pistols and a wide hat with sweeping plume. The careless Cavalier songs have the air of being composed on horseback and written down on the saddle leather: riding ballads in a very different sense from the old riding ballads of the Scottish Border. Robert Browning has reproduced very exactly the characteristics of the species in his "Cavalier Tunes." In "Give a Rouse" he presents the Cavalier drinking; in "Boot and Saddle" the Cavalier riding, and in all of them the Cavalier swearing, laughing, and cheering for the King.

Kentish Sir Byng stood for his King,
Bidding the crop-headed Parliament swing;
And, pressing a troop unable to stoop
And see the rogues flourish and honest folk droop,
Marched them along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.
God for King Charles! Pym and such carles
To the Devil that prompts 'em their treasonous parles!
Hampden to hell, and his obsequies' knell
Serve Hazelrig, Fiennes, and young Harry as well!
Hold by the right, you double your might;
So, onward to Nottingham, fresh for the fight.

Indeed many modern poets, such as Burns, Scott, Browning, George Walter Thornbury, and Aytoun in his "Lays of the Scottish

Cavaliers," have caught and prolonged the ancient note, with a literary skill not often vouchsafed to the actual, contemporary singers.

Here, for instance, is a single stanza from Thornbury's overlong ballad, "The Three Troopers":—

Into the Devil Tavern three booted troopers strode,
From spur to feather spotted and splashed
With the mud of a winter road.
In each of their cups they dropped a crust
And stared at the guests with a frown;
Then drew their swords and roared, for a toast,
"God send this Crum-well-down!"

The singing and fighting Cavalier was most nobly represented by James Graham, Marquis of Montrose, a hero of romance and a great partisan leader. With a handful of wild Irish and West Highland clansmen,—Gordons, Camerons, McDonalds,—with no artillery, no commissariat, and hardly any cavalry, Montrose defeated the armies of the Covenant, took the towns of Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow, and Edinburgh, and in one brief and brilliant campaign, reconquered Scotland for the King. Nothing more romantic in the history of the Civil War than Montrose's descent upon Clan Campbell at Inverlochy, rushing down from Ben Nevis in the early morning fogs upon the shores of

wild Loch Eil. You may read of this exploit in Walter Scott's "Legend of Montrose," as you may read of the great Marquis's death in Aytoun's ballad, "The Execution of Montrose." For his success was short. He could not hold his wild army together: with the coming of harvest the clansmen dispersed to the glens and hills. Montrose escaped to Holland and, after the death of the King, venturing once more into the Highlands, with a commission from Charles II, he was defeated, taken prisoner, sentenced to death in Edinburgh, hanged, drawn, and quartered. His head was fixed on an iron spike on the pinnacle of the tollbooth; one hand set over the gate of Perth and one over the gate of Stirling; one leg over the gate of Aberdeen, the other over the gate of Glasgow. Montrose wrote only a handful of poems, rough, soldierly pieces,—one on the night before his execution, one on learning, at the Hague, of the King's death. But by far the best and the best known of these are the famous lines of which I will quote a part. You will notice that, under the form of a lover addressing his mistress, it is really the King speaking to his kingdom. You will notice also the fine Celtic boastfulness of the strain and the high-hearted courage of its most familiar passage —the gambler's courage who stakes his all on a single throw.

My dear and only love, I pray that little world
of thee
Be governed by no other sway than purest mon-
archy;
For if confusion have a part, which virtuous
souls abhor,
I'll hold a synod in my heart and never love thee
more.
As Alexander I will reign and I will reign
alone;
My thoughts did ever more disdain a rival on
my throne.
He either fears his fate too much, or his deserts
are small,
Who dares not put it to the touch, to gain or
lose it all,
But if no faithless action stain thy love and con-
stant word,
I'll make thee glorious by my pen and famous
by my sword:
I'll serve thee in such noble ways was never
heard before:
I'll crown and deck thee all with bays and love
thee more and more.

I have dwelt almost exclusively upon the military and political aspect of Cavalier verse. A wider view would include the miscellaneous poetry, and especially the love poetry of Carew, Herrick, Waller, Haberton, Lovelace, Suckling, Cowley, and others, who, if not, strictly speaking, Cavaliers, were royalists. For the only poets in England who

took the Parliament's side were Milton, George Wither, and Andrew Marvell. Of those I have named, some had much to do with public affairs and others had little. Thomas Carew, the court poet, died before the outbreak of the Civil War. Herrick was a country minister in Devonshire, who was deprived of his parish by Parliament and spent the interregnum in London. Edmund Waller, a member of the House of Commons, intrigued for the king and came near losing his head; but, being a cousin of Oliver Cromwell and very rich, was let off with a heavy fine and went to France. Sir John Suckling, a very brilliant and dissipated court favorite, a very typical Cavalier, had raised a troop of horse for the King in the Bishops' War: had conspired against Parliament, fled to the continent, and died at Paris by his own hand. Colonel Richard Lovelace fought in the royal armies, was twice imprisoned, spent all his large fortune in the cause and hung about London in great poverty, dying shortly before the Restoration. Cowley was a Cambridge scholar who lost his fellowship and went to France with the exiled court: became secretary to the queen, Henrietta Maria, and carried on correspondence in cipher between her and the captive King.

The love verses of these poets were in many keys: Carew's polished, courtly, and

somewhat artificial; Herrick's warm, natural, sweet, but richly sensuous rather than passionate; Cowley's coldly ingenious; Lovelace's and Haberton's serious and tender; Suckling's careless, gay, and "agreeably impudent," the poetry of gallantry rather than love, with a dash of cynicism: on its way to become the poetry of the Restoration wits.

ABRAHAM COWLEY

COWLEY has been constantly used to point a moral. He is the capital instance, in our literary history, of the instability of fame; or, rather, of the wide variation between contemporary rating and the judgment of posterity. Time has given its ironical answer to the very first line in the first poem of his collection:—

> What shall I do to be forever known?

When Cowley died in 1667 and was buried in Westminster Abbey near the tombs of Chaucer and Spenser, he was, in general opinion, the greatest English poet since the latter. "Paradise Lost" appeared in that same year, but at this date Milton's fame was not comparable with Cowley's, his junior by ten years. Milton's miscellaneous poems, first collected in 1645, did not reach a second edition till 1673. Meanwhile Cowley's works went through eight impressions.

I believe that the only contemporaries who rivaled him in popularity were Herbert and Cleveland, for Waller did not come to his own until after Cowley's death. Herbert's

"Temple," posthumously printed in 1634, had already become a religious classic. Masson computes its annual sale at a thousand copies for the first twenty years of its publication. Of Cleveland's poems eleven editions were issued during his lifetime—and none afterward. Apropos of the author's arrest at Norwich in 1655 and his magniloquent letter to Cromwell on that occasion, Carlyle caustically remarks: "This is John Cleveland, the famed Cantab scholar, Royalist Judge Advocate, and thrice illustrious satirist and son of the muses, who had gone through eleven editions in those times, far transcending all Miltons and all mortals—and does not now need any twelfth edition that we hear of." This was true till 1903 when Professor Berdan brought out the first modern and critical, and probably the final, edition of Cleveland. But neither Herbert nor Cleveland enjoyed anything like Cowley's literary eminence. Cleveland was a sharp political lampooner whose verses had a temporary vogue like "M'Fingal" or "The Gospel according to Benjamin." A few years later Butler did the same thing ten times as cleverly. Even "Hudibras" has lost much of its point, though its originality, learning, and wit have given it a certain sort of immortality, while Cleveland is utterly extinct. Herbert's work is, of course, more permanent than Cleve-

land's, and he is a truer poet than Cowley, though his appeal is to a smaller public, and he has but a single note.

For many years after his death, Cowley's continued to be a great name and fame; yet the swift decay of his real influence became almost proverbial. Dryden, who learned much from him; Addison, who uses him as a dreadful example in his essay on mixed wit; and Pope, who speaks of him with a traditional respect, all testify to this rapid loss of his hold upon the community of readers. It was in 1737 that Pope asked, "Who now reads Cowley?" which is much as if one should ask to-day, "Who now reads Byron?" or as if our grandchildren should inquire in 1960, "Who reads Tennyson?"

Cowley's literary fortunes have been in marked contrast with those of his contemporary, Robert Herrick, whose "Hesperides" fell silently from the press in 1643, and who died unnoticed in his remote Devonshire vicarage in 1674. You may search the literature of England for a hundred and fifty years without finding a single acknowledgment of Herrick's gift to that literature. The folio edition of Cowley's works, 1668, was accompanied with an imposing account of his life and writings by Thomas Sprat, afterwards Bishop of Rochester. Dr. Johnson's "Lives of the English Poets," 1779-1781,

begins with the life of Cowley, in which he gives his famous analysis of the metaphysical school, the *locus classicus* on that topic. And although Cowley's poetry had faded long ago and he had lost his readers, Johnson treats him as a dignified memory, worthy of a solid monument. No one had thought it worth while to write Herrick's biography, to address him in complimentary verse, to celebrate his death in elegy, to comment on his work, or even to mention his name. Dryden, Addison, Johnson, all the critics of three successive generations are quite dumb concerning Herrick. But for the circumstance that some of his little pieces, with the musical airs to which they were set, were included in several seventeenth century songbooks, there is nothing to show that there was any English poet named Herrick, until Dr. Nott reprinted a number of selections from "Hesperides" in 1810. But now Herrick is thoroughly revived and almost a favorite. His best things are in all the anthologies, and many of them are set to music by modern composers, and sung to the piano, as once to the lute. The critics rank him with Shelley among our foremost lyrical poets. Swinburne thought him the best of English song writers. The "Hesperides" is frequently reprinted, sometimes in *editions de luxe*, with sympa-

thetic illustrations by Mr. Abbey and other distinguished artists.

There are several reasons why Cowley cut so disproportionate a figure in his own generation. In the first place, he was a marvel of precocity. He wrote an epic at the age of ten and another at twelve. His first volume of verse, "Poetical Blossoms," was published in his fifteenth year, and one or two of the pieces in it were as good as anything that he did afterward. Chatterton was perhaps equally wonderful; while Milton, Pope, Keats, and Bryant all produced work, while still under age, which outranks Cowley's. Yet none of them showed quite so early maturity.

Again Cowley's personal character, learning, and public employments conferred dignity upon his literary work. He was the darling of Cambridge; and, when ejected by the parliament, joined the king at Oxford, and then followed the queen to Paris. He was a steadfast loyalist; but among the reckless, intriguing, dissolute Cavaliers who formed the entourage of the exiled court, Cowley's serious and thoroughly respectable character stood out in high relief. He took a medical degree from Oxford, and became proficient in botany, composing a Latin poem on plants. Dr. Johnson thought his Latin verse better than Milton's. After 1660 a member of the triumphant party, he was, notwithstanding,

highly esteemed by political opponents. He held a position of authority like Addison's or Southey's at a later day. When he died, Charles II said that Mr. Cowley had not left a better man behind him in England.

But, after all, the chief reason why Cowley was rated so high by his contemporaries was that his poetry fell in with the prevailing taste. Matthew Arnold said that the trouble with the Queen Anne poetry was that it was conceived in the wits and not in the soul. Cowley's poetry was cerebral, "stiff with intellection," as Coleridge said of another. He anticipated Dryden in his power of reasoning in verse. He is pedantically learned, bookish, scholastic, smells of the lamp, crams his verse with allusions and images drawn from physics, metaphysics, geography, alchemy, astronomy, history, school divinity, logic, grammar, and constitutional law. Above all, he had the quality on which his century placed such an abnormal value—wit: i.e., ingenuity in devising far-fetched conceits and detecting remote analogies. Without the subtlety of Donne and the quaintness of Herbert, he coldly carried out the method of the *concetti* poets into a system. At its best, this fashion now and then struck out a brilliant effect, as where Donne says of Mistress Elizabeth Drury:

Her pure and eloquent blood
Spoke in her cheek, and so divinely wrought
That one might almost say her body thought.

Or in Crashaw's celebrated line about the miracle at Cana:

Nympha pudica deum vidit et erubuit,

Englished by Dryden as

The conscious water saw its God and blushed.

But except in such rarely felicitous instances, this manner of writing is deplorable. Some of its most flagrant offenses are still notorious. Crashaw's description of Mary Magdalene's eyes as:

Two walking baths, two weeping motions,
Portable and compendious oceans.

Or Carew's lines on Maria Wentworth:

Else the soul grew so fast within
It burst the outward shell of sin,
And so was hatched a cherubin.

Cowley is full of these tasteless, unnatural conceits. His sins of the kind have been so insisted upon by Johnson and others that I need give but a single illustration. In an ode to his friend, Dr. Scarborough, he thus compliments him upon his skill in operating for calculus:

The cruel stone, that restless pain,
That's sometimes rolled away in vain
But still, like Sisyphus his stone, returns again,
Thou break'st and melt'st by learned juices' force
(A greater work, though short the way appear,
Than Hannibal's by vinegar).
Oppressed Nature's necessary course
It stops in vain; like Moses, thou
Strik'st but the rock, and straight the waters freely flow.

Here, in a passage of nine lines, the stone which the doctor removes from his patient's bladder is successively compared to the stone rolled away from Christ's sepulchre, the stone of Sisyphus, the Alps that Hannibal split with vinegar, and the rock which Moses smote for water. Manifestly this way of writing lends itself least of all to the poetry of passion. Cowley's love poems are his very worst failures. One can take a kind of pleasure in the sheer mental exercise of tracking the thought through one of his big Pindaric odes—the kind of pleasure one gets from solving a riddle or an equation, but not the kind which we ask of poetry. It is as Pope says: his epic and Pindaric art is forgotten; forgotten the four books, in rimed couplets, of the "Davideis"; forgotten the odes on Brutus, on the plagues of Egypt, on his Majesty's restoration, to Mr. Hobbes, and

to the Royal Society. Cowley had a genius for friendship, and his elegies are among his best things. There are passages well worthy of remembrance in his elegy on Crashaw, and several fine stanzas in his memorial verses on his Cambridge friend Hervey; though the piece, as a whole, is too long, and Dr. Johnson is probably singular in preferring it to "Lycidas." A hundred readers are familiar with the invocation to light in "Paradise Lost," for one who knows Cowley's ingenious and, in many parts, really beautiful "Hymn to Light."

The only writings of Cowley which keep afloat on time's current are his simplest and least ambitious—what Pope called "the language of his heart." His prose essays may still be read with enjoyment, though Lowell somewhat cruelly describes them as Montaigne and water. His translations from the Pseudo-Anacreon are standard, particularly the first ode, Θέλω λέγειν Ἀτρείδας; the Τέττιξ, or cicada; and the ode in praise of drinking, Ἡ γῆ μέλαινα πίνει. There is one little poem which remains an anthology favorite, "The Chronicle," Cowley's solitary experiment in society verse, a catalogue of the quite imaginary ladies with whom he has been in love. This is well enough, but compared with the "agreeable impudence," the Cavalier gayety and ease of a genuine society

verser, like Suckling, it is sufficiently tame. For the Cowleian wit is so different from the spirit of comedy that one would have predicted that anything which he might undertake for the stage would surely fail. Nevertheless, one of his plays, "Cutter of Coleman Street," has been selected by Professor Gayley for his series of representative comedies, as a noteworthy transition drama, with "political and religious satire of great importance."

The scene is London in 1658, the year when Cromwell died, and Cowley, though under bonds, escaped a second time to Paris. The plot in outline is this: Colonel Jolly, a gentleman whose estate was confiscated in the late troubles for taking part with the King at Oxford, finds himself in desperate straits for money. He has two disreputable hangers-on, "merry, sharking fellows about the town," who have been drinking and feasting at his expense. One of these, Cutter of Coleman Street, pretends to have been a colonel in the royal army and to have fought at Newbury—the action, it will be remembered, in which Clarendon's friend, Lord Falkland, met his tragic death (1643); or, as Carlyle rather brutally puts it, "Poor Lord Falkland, in his 'clean shirt,' was killed here." Worm, the other rascal, professes likewise to have been in the King's service and to have

been at Worcester and shared in the romantic escape of the royal fugitive. This precious pair are new types in English comedy and are evidently from the life. They represent the class of swashbucklers, impostors, and soldiers of fortune, who lurked about the lowest purlieus of London during the interregnum, living at free quarters on loyalist sympathizers. They were parodies of the true "distressed Cavaliers," such as Colonel Richard Lovelace, who died in London in this same year, 1658, in some obscure lodging and in abject poverty, having spent all his large fortune in the King's cause.

When "Cutter of Coleman Street"* was first given in 1661, the characters of Cutter and Worm were ill received by the audience at the Duke's Theatre; and, in his preface to the printed play, the author defended himself against the charge "that it was a piece intended for abuse and satire against the king's party. Good God! Against the king's party! After having served it twenty years, during all the time of their misfortunes and afflictions, I must be a very rash and imprudent person if I chose out that of their restitution to begin a quarrel with them." The representation of those two scoundrels, "as pretended officers of the royal army, was made

*An earlier version, entitled "The Guardian," had been acted in 1641.

for no other purpose but to show the world that the vices and extravagancies imputed vulgarly to the cavaliers were really committed by aliens who only usurped that name."

Colonel Jolly is guardian to his niece, Lucia, who has an inheritance of five thousand pounds which, by the terms of her father's will, is to be forfeited if she marries without her uncle's consent. This is now a very stale bit of dramatic convention. Experienced play readers do not need to be reminded that "forfeited if transferred" is written large over the fortune of nearly every heiress in eighteenth century comedy. Colonel Jolly sees through his rascally followers, but is so reduced in purse that he offers Lucia's hand to whichever of the two can gain her consent, on condition that the favored suitor will make over to him one thousand pounds out of his niece's dowry. Of course she rejects both of them. This unprincipled bargain was quite properly censured as out of keeping with the character of an honorable old Cavalier gentleman who had fought for the King. And again the dramatist defends himself in his preface. "They were angry that the person whom I made a true gentleman and one both of considerable quality and sufferings in the royal party . . . should submit, in his great extremities, to wrong his

niece for his own relief. . . . The truth is I did not intend the character of a hero . . . but an ordinary jovial gentleman, commonly called a good fellow, one not so conscientious as to starve rather than do the least injury."

The failure of his plan puts the colonel upon an almost equally desperate enterprise, which is no less than to espouse the widow of Fear-the-Lord Barebottle, a saint and a soap-boiler, who had bought Jolly's confiscated estate, and whose name is an evident allusion to the leather-seller, Praise-God Barebones, who gave baptism to the famous Barebones' Parliament. The colonel succeeds in this matrimonial venture; although, to ingratiate himself with the soap-boiler's widow, he has to feign conversion. His daughter Aurelia tries to dissuade him from the match. "Bless us," she says, "what humming and hawing will be in this house; what preaching and howling and fasting and eating among the saints! Their first pious work will be to banish Fletcher and Ben Jonson out o' the parlour, and bring in their rooms Martin Mar Prelate and Posies of Holy Honeysuckles and A Salve-Box for a wounded Conscience and a Bundle of Grapes from Canaan. . . . But, Sir, suppose the king should come in again and you have your own again of course. You'd be very proud of a soap-boiler's widow then in Hyde Park, Sir."

"O," replies her father, "then the bishops will come in, too, and she'll away to New England."

Here comes in the satire on the Puritans which is the most interesting feature of the play. Anti-Puritan satire was nothing new on the stage in 1661, and it had been much better done in Jonson's "Alchemist" and "Bartholomew Fair" nearly a half century before. The thing that is new in Cowley's play is its picture of the later aspects of the Puritan revolution; when what had been in Jonson's time a despised faction had now been seated in power for sixteen years, and had developed all those extravagances of fanaticism which Carlyle calls "Calvinistic Sansculottism." Widow Barebottle is a Brownist and a parishioner of Rev. Joseph Knockdown, of the congregation of the spotless in Coleman Street. But her daughter Tabitha is of the Fifth Monarchy persuasion and was wont to go afoot every Sunday over the bridge to hear Mr. Feak,* when he was a prisoner in Lambeth House. Visions and prophesyings have been vouchsafed to Tabitha. And when Cutter, following his patron's lead, pays court to her in a puritanical habit, he assures her that it has been revealed to him that he is no longer to be called Cutter, a

*An Anabaptist preacher. See Carlyle's "Cromwell's Letters and Speeches," iv. 3.

name of Cavalero darkness: "My name is now Abednego. I had a vision, which whispered to me through a keyhole, 'Go call thyself Abednego. It is a name that signifies fiery furnaces and tribulation and martyrdom.'" He is to suffer martyrdom and return miraculously upon "a purple dromedary, which signifies magistracy, with an axe in my hand that is called reformation; and I am to strike with that axe upon the gate of Westminster Hall and cry 'Down, Babylon,' and the building called Westminster Hall is to run away and cast itself into the river; and then Major General Harrison is to come in green sleeves from the north upon a sky-colored mule which signifies heavenly instruction . . . and he is to have a trumpet in his mouth as big as a steeple and, at the sounding of that trumpet, all the churches in London shall fall down . . . and then Venner shall march up to us from the west in the figure of a wave of the sea, holding in his hand a ship that shall be called the ark of the reformed."

All this is frankly farcical but has a certain historical basis. The Venner here mentioned was a Fifth Monarchist cooper whose followers held a rendezvous at Mile-End Green, and who issued a pamphlet entitled "A Standard Set Up," adopting as his ensign the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, with the motto, "Who shall rouse him up?" The pas-

sage furthermore seems to allude to one John Davy, to whom in 1654 the spirit revealed that his true name was Theauro John; and who was arrested at the door of the Parliament House for knocking and laying about him with a drawn sword. "Poor Davy," comments Carlyle, "his labors, life-adventures, financial arrangements, painful biography in general, are all unknown to us; till, on this 'Saturday, 30th December, 1654,' he very clearly knocks loud at the door of the Parliament House, as much as to say, 'what is this *you* are upon?' and 'lays about him with a drawn sword.'"

The dialogue abounds in the biblical phrases and the peculiar cant of the later Puritanism, familiar in "Hudibras." Brother Abednego is joined to Tabitha in the holy bond of sanctified matrimony at a zealous shoemaker's habitation by that chosen vessel, Brother Zephaniah Fats, an opener of revelations to the worthy in Mary White-Chapel. But as soon as they are safely married, the newly converted Cutter throws off his Puritan disguise and dons a regular Cavalier costume, hat and feather, sword and belt, broad laced band and periwig, and proceeds to pervert his bride. He makes her drink healths in sack, and sing and dance home after the fiddlers, under the threat of taking coach and carrying her off to the

opera. Tabitha, after a faint resistance, falls into his humor and proves an apt pupil in the ways of worldliness. For it is a convention of seventeenth century, as it is of twentieth century, comedy that all Puritans are hypocrites and that

> Every woman is at heart a rake.

MILTON'S TERCENTENARY

IT is right that this anniversary should be kept in all English-speaking lands. Milton is as far away from us in time as Dante was from him; destructive criticism has been busy with his great poem; formidable rivals of his fame have arisen—Dryden and Pope, Wordsworth and Byron, Tennyson and Browning, not to speak of lesser names—poets whom we read perhaps oftener and with more pleasure. Yet still his throne remains unshaken. By general—by well-nigh universal—consent, he is still the second poet of our race, the greatest, save one, of all who have used the English speech.

The high epics, the Iliad, the Divine Comedy, do not appear to us as they appeared to their contemporaries, nor as they appeared to the Middle Ages, or to the men of the Renaissance or of the eighteenth century. These peaks of song we see foreshortened or in changed perspective or from a different angle of observation. Their parallax varies from age to age, yet their stature does not dwindle; they tower forever, "like Teneriffe or Atlas unremoved." "Paradise Lost" does

not mean the same thing to us that it meant to Addison or Johnson or Macaulay, and much that those critics said of it now seems mistaken. Works of art, as of nature, have perishable elements, and suffer a loss from time's transshifting. Homer's gods are childish, Dante's hell grotesque; and the mythology of the one and the scholasticism of the other are scarcely more obsolete to-day than Milton's theology. Yet in the dryest parts of "Paradise Lost" we feel the touch of the master. Two things in particular, the rhythm and the style, go on victoriously as by their own momentum. God the Father may be a school divine and Adam a member of parliament, but the verse never flags, the diction never fails. The poem may grow heavy, but not languid, thin, or weak. I confess that there are traits of Milton which repel or irritate; that there are poets with whom sympathy is easier. And if I were speaking merely as an impressionist, I might prefer them to him. But this does not affect my estimate of his absolute greatness.

All poets, then, and lovers of poetry, all literary critics and students of language must honor in Milton the almost faultless artist, the supreme master of his craft. But there is a reason why, not alone the literary class, but all men of English stock should celebrate Milton's tercentenary. There have

been poets whose technique was exquisite, but whose character was contemptible. John Milton was not simply a great poet, but a great man, a heroic soul; and his type was characteristically English, both in its virtues and its shortcomings. Of Shakespeare, the man, we know next to nothing. But of Milton personally we know all that we need to know, more than is known of many a modern author. There is abundance of biography and autobiography. Milton had a noble self-esteem, and he was engaged for twenty years in hot controversies. Hence those passages of apologetics scattered through his prose works, from which the lives of their author have been largely compiled. Moreover he was a pamphleteer and journalist, as well as a poet, uttering himself freely on the questions of the day. We know his opinions on government, education, religion, marriage and divorce, the freedom of the press, and many other subjects. We know what he thought of eminent contemporaries, Charles I, Cromwell, Vane, Desborough, Overton, Fairfax. It was not then the fashion to write critical essays, literary reviews, and book notices. Yet, aside from his own practice, his writings are sown here and there with incidental judgments of books and authors, from which his literary principles may be gathered. He has spoken now and again

of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, of Spenser, Chaucer, Euripides, Homer, the book of Job, the psalms of David, the Song of Solomon, the poems of Tasso and Ariosto, the Arthur and Charlemagne romances: of Bacon and Selden, the dramatic unities, blank verse vs. rhyme, and similar topics.

In some aspects and relations, harsh and unlovely, egotistical and stubborn, the total impression of Milton's personality is singularly imposing. His virtues were manly virtues. Of the four cardinal moral virtues,—the so-called Aristotelian virtues,—temperance, justice, fortitude, prudence, which Dante symbolizes by the group of stars—

Non viste mai fuor ch' alla prima gente—

Milton had a full share. He was not always, though he was most commonly, just. Prudence, the only virtue, says Carlyle, which gets its reward on earth, prudence he had, yet not a timid prudence. Of temperance—the Puritan virtue—and all that it includes, chastity, self-reverence, self-control, "Comus" is the beautiful hymn. But, above all, Milton had the heroic virtue, fortitude; not only passively in the proud and sublime endurance of the evil days and evil tongues on which he had fallen; of the darkness, dangers, solitude that compassed him round; but actively in "the unconquerable will . . . and

courage never to submit or yield"; the courage which "bates no jot of heart or hope, but still bears up and steers right onward."

There is nothing more bracing in English poetry than those passages in the sonnets, in "Paradise Lost" and in "Samson Agonistes" where Milton speaks of his blindness. Yet here it is observable that Milton, who is never sentimental, is also never pathetic but when he speaks of himself, in such lines, e.g., as Samson's

> My race of glory run, and race of shame,
> And I shall shortly be with them that rest.

Dante has this same touching dignity in alluding to his own sorrows; but his hard and rare pity is more often aroused by the sorrows of others: by Ugolino's little starving children, or by the doom of Francesca and her lover. Milton is untender. Yet virtue with him is not always forbidding and austere. As he was a poet, he felt the "beauty of holiness," though in another sense than Archbishop Laud's use of that famous phrase. It was his "natural haughtiness," he tells us, that saved him from sensuality and base descents of mind. His virtue was a kind of good taste, a delicacy almost womanly. It is the "Lady of Christ's" speaking with the lips of the lady in "Comus," who says,

—That which is not good is not delicious
To a well governed and wise appetite.

But there is a special fitness in this commemoration at this place. For Milton is the scholar poet. He is the most learned, the most classical, the most bookish—I was about to say the most academic—of English poets; but I remember that academic, through its use in certain connections, might imply a timid conformity to rules and models, a lack of vital originality which would not be true of Milton. Still, Milton was an academic man in a broad sense of the word. A hard student of books, he injured his eyes in boyhood by too close application, working every day till midnight. He spent seven years at his university. He was a teacher and a writer on education. I need not give the catalogue of his acquirements further than to say that he was the best educated Englishman of his generation.

Mark Pattison, indeed, who speaks for Oxford, denies that Milton was a regularly learned man, like Usher or Selden. That is, I understand, he had made no exhaustive studies in professional fields of knowledge such as patristic theology or legal antiquities. Of course not: Milton was a poet: he was studying for power, for self-culture and inspiration, and had little regard for a

merely retrospective scholarship which would not aid him in the work of creation.

Be that as it may, all Milton's writings in prose and verse are so saturated with learning as greatly to limit the range of their appeal. A poem like "Lycidas," loaded with allusions, can be fully enjoyed only by the classical scholar who is in the tradition of the Greek pastoralists, who "knows the Dorian water's gush divine." I have heard women and young people and unlettered readers who have a natural taste for poetry, and enjoy Burns and Longfellow, object to this classical stiffness in Milton as pedantry. Now pedantry is an ostentation of learning for its own sake, and none has said harder things of it than Milton.

> . . . Who reads
> Incessantly, and to his reading brings not
> A spirit and judgment equal or superior . . .
> Uncertain and unsettled still remains,
> Deep-versed in books and shallow in himself.

Cowley was the true pedant: his erudition was crabbed and encumbered the free movement of his mind, while Milton made his the grace and ornament of his verse.

> How charming is divine philosophy!
> Not harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose,
> But musical as is Apollo's lute.

I think we may attribute Milton's apparent pedantry, not to a wish for display, but to an imagination familiarized with a somewhat special range of associations. This is a note of the Renaissance, and Milton's culture was Renaissance culture. That his mind derived its impetus more directly from books than from life; that his pages swarm with the figures of mythology and the imagery of the ancient poets is true. In his youthful poems he accepted and perfected Elizabethan, that is, Renaissance, forms: the court masque, the Italian sonnet, the artificial pastoral. But as he advanced in art and life, he became classical in a severer sense, discarding the Italianate conceits of his early verse, rejecting rhyme and romance, replacing decoration with construction; and finally, in his epic and tragedy modelled on the pure antique, applying Hellenic form to Hebraic material. His political and social, no less than his literary, ideals were classical. The English church ritual, with its Catholic ceremonies; the universities, with their scholastic curricula; the feudal monarchy, the mediaeval court and peerage—of all these barbarous survivals of the Middle Ages he would have made a clean sweep, to set up in their stead a commonwealth modelled on the democracies of Greece and Rome, schools of philosophy like the Academy and the Porch, and volun-

tary congregations of Protestant worshippers without priest, liturgy or symbol, practising a purely rational and spiritual religion. He says to the parliament: "How much better I find ye esteem it to imitate the old and elegant humanity of Greece than the barbaric pride of a Hunnish and Norwegian stateliness." And elsewhere: "Those ages to whose polite wisdom and letters we owe that we are not yet Goths and Jutlanders."

So, in his treatment of public questions, Milton had what Bacon calls "the humor of a scholar." He was an idealist and a doctrinaire, with little historic sense and small notion of what is practicable here and now. England is still a monarchy; the English church is still prelatical and has its hireling clergy; parliament keeps its two chambers, and the bishops sit and vote in the house of peers; ritualism and tractarianism gain apace upon low church and evangelical; the "Areopagitica" had no effect whatever in hastening the freedom of the press; and, ironically enough, Milton himself, under the protectorate, became an official book licenser.

England was not ripe for a republic; she was returning to her idols, "choosing herself a captain back to Egypt." It took a century and a half for English liberty to recover the ground lost at the Restoration. Nevertheless, that little group of republican ideal-

ists, Vane, Bradshaw, Lambert and the rest, with Milton their literary spokesman, must always interest us as Americans and republicans. Let us, however, not mistake. Milton was no democrat. His political principles were republican, or democratic if you please, but his personal feelings were intensely aristocratic. Even that free commonwealth which he thought he saw so easy and ready a way to establish, and the constitution of which he sketched on the eve of the Restoration, was no democracy, but an aristocratic, senatorial republic like Venice, a government of the *optimates*, not of the populace. For the trappings of royalty, the pomp and pageantry, the servility and flunkeyism of a court, Milton had the contempt of a plain republican:

> How poor their outworn coronets
> Beside one leaf of that plain civic wreath!

But for the people, as a whole, he had an almost equal contempt. They were "the ungrateful multitude," "the inconsiderate multitude," the *profanum vulgus*, "the throng and noises of vulgar and irrational men." There was not a popular drop of blood in him. He had no faith in universal suffrage or majority rule. "More just it is," he wrote, "that a less number compel a greater to retain their liberty, than that a greater

number compel a less to be their fellow slaves," i.e., to bring back the king by a *plébescite*. And again: "The best affected and best principled of the people stood not numbering or computing on which side were most voices in Parliament, but on which side appeared to them most reason."

Milton was a Puritan; and the Puritans, though socially belonging, for the most part, among the plain people, and though made by accident the champions of popular rights against privilege, were yet a kind of spiritual aristocrats. Calvinistic doctrine made of the elect a chosen few, a congregation of saints, set apart from the world. To this feeling of religious exclusiveness Milton's pride of intellect added a personal intensity. He respects distinction and is always rather scornful of the average man, the *pecus ignavum silentûm*, the herd of the obscure and unfamed.

> Nor do I name of men the common rout
> That, wandering loose about,
> Grow up and perish like the summer fly,
> Heads without names, no more remembered.

Hazlitt insisted that Shakespeare's principles were aristocratic, chiefly, I believe, because of his handling of the tribunes and the plebs in "Coriolanus." Shakespeare does treat his mobs with a kindly and amused contempt.

They are fickle, ignorant, illogical, thick-headed, easily imposed upon. Still he makes you feel that they are composed of good fellows at bottom, quickly placated and disposed to do the fair thing. I think that Shakespeare's is the more democratic nature; that his distrust of the people is much less radical than Milton's. Walt Whitman's obstreperous democracy, his all-embracing *camaraderie*, his liking for the warm, gregarious pressure of the crowd, was a spirit quite alien from his whose "soul was like a star and dwelt apart." Anything vulgar was outside or below the sympathies of this Puritan gentleman. Falstaff must have been merely disgusting to him; and fancy him reading Mark Twain! In Milton's references to popular pastimes there is always a mixture of disapproval, the air of the superior person. "The people on their holidays," says Samson, are "impetuous, insolent, unquenchable." "Methought," says the lady in "Comus,"

> . . . it was the sound
> Of riot and ill managed merriment,
> Such as the jocund flute or gamesome pipe
> Stirs up among the loose, unlettered hinds
> When, for their teeming flocks and granges full,
> In wanton dance they praise the bounteous Pan
> And thank the gods amiss.

Milton liked to be in the minority, to bear up against the pressure of hostile opinion. "God intended to prove me," he wrote, "whether I durst take up alone a rightful cause against a world of disesteem, and found I durst." The seraph Abdiel is a piece of self-portraiture; there is no more characteristic passage in all his works:

> . . . The Seraph Abdiel, faithful found
> Among the faithless, faithful only he . . .
> Nor number nor example with him wrought
> To swerve from truth or change his constant mind,
> Though single. From amidst them forth he past
> Long way through hostile scorn which he sustained
> Superior, nor of violence feared aught;
> And with retorted scorn his back he turned
> On those proud towers to swift destruction doomed.

Milton was no democrat; equality and fraternity were not his trade, though liberty was his passion. Liberty he defended against the tyranny of the mob, as of the king. He preferred a republic to a monarchy, since he thought it less likely to interfere with the independence of the private citizen. Political liberty, liberty of worship and belief, freedom of the press, freedom of divorce, he asserted them all in turn with unsurpassed eloquence. He proposed a scheme of educa-

tion reformed from the clogs of precedent and authority. Even his choice of blank verse for "Paradise Lost" he vindicated as a case of "ancient *liberty* recovered to heroic song from this troublesome and modern bondage of riming."

There is yet one reason more why we at Yale should keep this anniversary. Milton was the poet of English Puritanism, and therefore he is *our* poet. This colony and this college were founded by English Puritans; and here the special faith and manners of the Puritans survived later than at the other great university of New England—survived almost in their integrity down to a time within the memory of living men. When Milton left Cambridge in 1632, "church-outed by the prelates," it was among the possibilities that, instead of settling down at his father's country house at Horton, he might have come to New England. Winthrop had sailed, with his company, two years before. In 1635 three thousand Puritans emigrated to Massachusetts, among them Sir Henry Vane, the younger,—the "Vane, young in years, but in sage counsels old," of Milton's sonnet,—who was made governor of the colony in the following year. Or in 1638, the year of the settlement of New Haven, when Milton went to Italy for culture, it would not have been miraculous had he come

instead to America for freedom. It was in that same year that, according to a story long believed though now discredited, Cromwell, Pym, Hampden and Hazelrig, despairing of any improvement in conditions at home, were about to embark for New England when they were stopped by orders in council. Is it too wild a dream that "Paradise Lost" might have been written in Boston or in New Haven? But it was not upon the cards. The literary class does not willingly emigrate to raw lands, or separate itself from the thick and ripe environment of an old civilization. However, we know that Vane and Roger Williams were friends of Milton; and he must have known and been known to Cromwell's chaplain, Hugh Peters, who had been in New England; and doubtless to others among the colonists. It is, at first sight, therefore rather strange that there is no mention of Milton, so far as I have observed, in any of our earlier colonial writers. It is said, I know not on what authority, that there was not a single copy of Shakespeare's plays in New England in the seventeenth century. That is not so strange, considering the Puritan horror of the stage. But one might have expected to meet with mention of Milton, as a controversialist if not as a poet. The French Huguenot poet Du Bartas, whose poem "La Semaine" contributed some items

to the account of the creation in "Paradise Lost," was a favorite author in New England—I take it, in Sylvester's translation, "The Divine Weeks and Works." It is also said that the "Emblems" of Milton's contemporary, Francis Quarles, were much read in New England. But Tyler supposes that Nathaniel Ames, in his Almanac for 1725, "pronounced there for the first time the name of Milton, together with chosen passages from his poems." And he thinks it worth noting that Lewis Morris, of Morrisania, ordered an edition of Milton from a London bookseller in 1739.*

The failure of our forefathers to recognize the great poet of their cause may be explained partly by the slowness of the growth of Milton's fame in England. His minor poems, issued in 1645, did not reach a second edition till 1673. "Paradise Lost," printed in 1667, found its fit audience, though few, almost immediately. But the latest literature travelled slowly in those days into a remote and rude province. Moreover, the educated class in New England, the ministers,

*Mr. Charles Francis Adams informs me that a letter of inquiry sent by him to the *Evening Post* has brought out three or four references to Milton in the "Magnalia," besides other allusions to him in the publications of the period. Mr. Adams adds, however, that there is nothing to show that "Paradise Lost" was much read in New England prior to 1750. The "Magnalia" was published in 1702.

though a learned, were not a literary set, as is abundantly shown by their own experiments in verse. It is not unlikely that Cotton Mather or Michael Wigglesworth would have thought Du Bartas and Quarles better poets than Milton if they had read the latter's works.

We are proud of being the descendants of the Puritans; perhaps we are glad that we are their descendants only, and not their contemporaries. Which side would you have been on, if you had lived during the English civil war of the seventeenth century? Doubtless it would have depended largely on whether you lived in Middlesex or in Devon, whether your parents were gentry or tradespeople, and on similar accidents. We think that we choose, but really choices are made for us. We inherit our politics and our religion. But if free to choose, I know in which camp I would have been, and it would not have been that in which Milton's friends were found. The New Model army had the discipline—and the prayer meetings. I am afraid that Rupert's troopers plundered, gambled, drank, and swore most shockingly. There was good fighting on both sides, but the New Model had the right end of the quarrel and had the victory, and I am glad that it was so. Still there was more fun

in the king's army, and it was there that most of the good fellows were.

The influence of Milton's religion upon his art has been much discussed. It was owing to his Puritanism that he was the kind of poet that he was, but it was in spite of his Puritanism that he was a poet at all. He was the poet of a cause, a party, a sect whose attitude towards the graces of life and the beautiful arts was notoriously one of distrust and hostility. He was the poet, not only of that Puritanism which is a permanent element in English character, but of much that was merely temporary and local. How sensitive then must his mind have been to all forms of loveliness, how powerful the creative instinct in him, when his genius emerged without a scar from the long struggle of twenty years, during which he had written pamphlet after pamphlet on the angry questions of the day, and nothing at all in verse but a handful of sonnets mostly provoked by public occasions!

The fact is, there were all kinds of Puritans. There were dismal precisians, like William Prynne, illiberal and vulgar fanatics, the Tribulation Wholesomes, Hope-on-high Bombys, and Zeal-of-the-land Busys, whose absurdities were the stock in trade of contemporary satirists from Jonson to Butler. But there were also gentlemen and

scholars, like Fairfax, Marvell, Colonel Hutchinson, Vane, whose Puritanism was consistent with all elegant tastes and accomplishments. Was Milton's Puritanism hurtful to his art? No and yes. It was in many ways an inspiration; it gave him *zeal*, a Puritan word much ridiculed by the Royalists; it gave refinement, distinction, selectness, elevation to his picture of the world. But it would be uncritical to deny that it also gave a certain narrowness and rigidity to his view of human life.

It is curious how Milton's early poems have changed places in favor with "Paradise Lost." They were neglected for over a century. Joseph Warton testifies in 1756 that they had only "very lately met with a suitable regard"; had lain "in a sort of obscurity, the private enjoyment of a few curious readers." And Dr. Johnson exclaims: "Surely no man could have fancied that he read 'Lycidas' with pleasure, had he not known its author." There can be little doubt that nowadays Milton's *juvenilia* are more read than "Paradise Lost," and by many—perhaps by a majority of readers—rated higher. In this opinion I do not share. "Paradise Lost" seems to me not only greater work, more important, than the minor pieces, but better poetry, richer and deeper. Yet one quality these early poems have which "Para-

dise Lost" has not—charm. Milton's epic astonishes, moves, delights, but it does not fascinate. The youthful Milton was sensitive to many attractions which he afterwards came to look upon with stern disapproval. He went to the theatre and praised the comedies of Shakespeare and Jonson; he loved the romances of chivalry and fairy tales; he had no objection to dancing, ale drinking, the music of the fiddle, and rural sports; he writes to Diodati of the pretty girls on the London streets; he celebrates the Catholic and Gothic elegancies of English church architecture and ritual, the cloister's pale, the organ music and full-voiced choir, the high embowed roof, and the storied windows which his military friends were soon to smash at Ely, Salisbury, Canterbury, Lichfield, as popish idolatries. But in "Iconoclastes" we find him sneering at the king for keeping a copy of Shakespeare in his closet. In his treatise "Of Reformation" he denounces the prelates for "embezzling the treasury of the church on painted and gilded walls of temples, wherein God hath testified to have no delight." Evidently the Anglican service was one of those "gay religions, rich with pomp and gold," to which he alludes in "Paradise Lost." A chorus commends Samson the Nazarite for drinking nothing but water. Modern tragedies are condemned for

"mixing comic stuff with tragic sadness and gravity, or introducing trivial and vulgar persons"—as Shakespeare does. In "Paradise Lost" the poet speaks with contempt of the romances whose "chief mastery" it was

> . . . to dissect,
> With long and tedious havoc, fabled knights
> In battles feigned.

And in "Paradise Regained" he even disparages his beloved classics, preferring the psalms of David, the Hebrew prophecies and the Mosaic law, to the poets, philosophers, and orators of Athens.

The Puritans were Old Testament men. Their God was the Hebrew Jehovah, their imaginations were filled with the wars of Israel and the militant theocracy of the Jews. In Milton's somewhat patronizing attitude toward women, there is something Mosaic—something almost Oriental. He always remained susceptible to beauty in women, but he treated it as a weakness, a temptation. The bitterness of his own marriage experience mingles with his words. I need not cite the well-known passages about Dalila and Eve, where he who reads between the lines can always detect the figure of Mary Powell. There is no gallantry in Milton, but a deal of common sense. The love of the court poets, cavaliers and sonneteers,

their hyperboles of passion, their abasement before their ladies he doubtless scorned as the fopperies of chivalry, fantastic and unnatural exaggerations, the insincerities of "vulgar amourists," the fume of

> . . . court amour,
> Mixt dance, or wanton mask, or midnight ball,
> Or serenate which the starved lover sings
> To his proud fair, best quitted with disdain.

To the Puritan, woman was at best the helpmate and handmaid of man. Too often she was a snare, or a household foe, "a cleaving mischief far within defensive arms." "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" are the only poems of Milton in which he surrenders himself spontaneously to the joy of living, to "unreproved pleasures free," with no *arrière pensée*, or intrusion of the conscience. Even in those pleasant Horatian lines to Lawrence, inviting him to spend a winter day by the fire, drink wine, and hear music, he ends with a fine Puritan touch:

> He who of these delights can judge, yet spare
> To interpose them oft, is truly wise.

"Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" inquires Sir Toby of Shakespeare's only Puritan.

"Yes," adds the clown, "and ginger shall be hot in the mouth, too." And "wives may be merry and yet honest," asserts Mistress Page.

It is not without astonishment that one finds Emerson writing, "To this antique heroism Milton added the genius of the Christian sanctity . . . laying its chief stress on humility." Milton had a zeal for righteousness, a noble purity and noble pride. But if you look for saintly humility, for the spirit of the meek and lowly Jesus, the spirit of charity and forgiveness, look for them in the Anglican Herbert, not in the Puritan Milton. Humility was no fruit of the system which Calvin begot and which begot John Knox. The Puritans were great invokers of the sword of the Lord and of Gideon—the sword of Gideon and the dagger of Ehud. There went a sword out of Milton's mouth against the enemies of Israel, a sword of threatenings, the wrath of God upon the ungodly. The temper of his controversial writings is little short of ferocious. There was not much in him of that "sweet reasonableness" which Matthew Arnold thought the distinctive mark of Christian ethics. He was devout, but not with the Christian devoutness. I would not call him a Christian at all, except, of course, in his formal adherence to the creed of Christianity. Very significant is

the inferiority of "Paradise Regained" to "Paradise Lost." And in "Paradise Lost" itself, how weak and faint is the character of the Saviour! You feel that he is superfluous, that the poet did not need him. He is simply the second person of the Trinity, the executive arm of the Godhead; and Milton is at pains to invent things for him to do—to drive the rebellious angels out of heaven, to preside over the six days' work of creation, etc. I believe it was Thomas Davidson who said that in "Paradise Lost" "Christ is God's good boy."

We are therefore not unprepared to discover, from Milton's "Treatise of Christian Doctrine," that he had laid aside the dogma of vicarious sacrifice and was, in his last years, a Unitarian. It was this Latin treatise, translated and published in 1824, which called out Macaulay's essay, so urbanely demolished by Matthew Arnold, and which was triumphantly reviewed by Dr. Channing in the *North American*. It was lucky for Dr. Channing, by the way, that he lived in the nineteenth century and not in the seventeenth. Two Socinians, Leggatt and Wightman, were burned at the stake as late as James the First's reign, one at Lichfield and the other at Smithfield.

Milton, then, does not belong with those broadly human, all tolerant, impartial ar-

tists, who reflect, with equal sympathy and infinite curiosity, every phase of life: with Shakespeare and Goethe or, on a lower level, with Chaucer and Montaigne; but with the intense, austere and lofty souls whose narrowness is likewise their strength. His place is beside Dante, the Catholic Puritan.

SHAKESPEARE'S CONTEMPORARIES

THE one contribution of the Elizabethan stage to the literature of the world is the plays of Shakespeare. It seems unaccountable to us to-day that the almost infinite superiority of his work to that of all his contemporaries was not recognized in his own lifetime. There is frequent mention in the literature of his time, of "the excellent dramatic writer, Master Wm. Shakespeare" and usually in the way of praise, but in the same category with other excellent dramatic writers, like Jonson, Chapman, Webster, and Beaumont, and with no apparent suspicion that he is in a quite different class from these, and forms indeed a class by himself—is *sui generis*. In explanation of this blindness it should be said, first that time is required to give the proper perspective to literary values, and secondly that there is an absence of critical documents from the Elizabethan period. There were no reviews or book notices or literary biographies. A man in high place who was incidentally an author, a great philosopher and statesman like Bacon, a diplomatist and scholar like Sir

Henry Wotton, a bishop or a learned divine, like Sanderson, Donne or Herbert, might be thought worthy to have his life recorded. But a mere man of letters—still more a mere playwriter—was not entitled to a biography. Nowadays every writer of fair pretensions has his literary portrait in the magazines. His work is criticized, assayed, analyzed; and as soon as he is dead, his life and letters appear in two volumes. We do not know what Shakespeare's contemporaries thought of him, except for a few complimentary verses, and a few brief notices scattered through the miscellaneous books and pamphlets of the time; and these in no wise characterize or distinguish him, or set him apart from the crowd of fellow playwrights, from among whom he has since so thoroughly emerged. Aside from the almost universal verdict of posterity that Shakespeare is one of the greatest, if not actually the greatest literary genius of all time, there are two testimonies to his continued vitality. One of these is the fact that his plays have never ceased to be played. At least twenty of his plays still belong to the acted drama. Several of the others, less popular, are revived from time to time. We do not often have a chance in England or America to see "Troilus and Cressida," or "Measure for Measure," or "Richard II"—all pieces of the highest in-

tellectual interest—to see them behind the footlights. But all of Shakespeare's thirty-seven plays are given annually in Germany. Indeed, the Germans claim to have appropriated Shakespeare and to have made him their own.

Now the only seventeenth century play outside of Shakespeare which still keeps the stage is Massinger's comedy, "A New Way to Pay Old Debts." This has frequently been given in America, with artists like Edwin Booth and E. L. Davenport in the leading rôle, Sir Giles Overreach. A number of the plays of Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Dekker, Heywood, Middleton, and perhaps other Elizabethan dramatists continued to be played down to the middle of the eighteenth century, and a few of them as late as 1788. Fletcher's comedy, "Rule a Wife and Have a Wife," was acted in 1829; and Dekker's "Old Fortunatus"* enjoyed a run of twelve performances in 1819. But these were sporadic revivals. Professor Gayley concludes that of the two hundred and fifty comedies, exclusive of Shakespeare's,

*"Every Man in his Humor" lasted well down into the nineteenth century on the stage. And here are a few haphazard dates of late performances of Elizabethan plays: "The Pilgrim," 1812; "Philaster," 1817; "The Chances," 1820; "The Wild Goose Chase," 1820; "The City Madam," 1822; "The Humorous Lieutenant," 1817; "The Spanish Curate," 1840.

produced between 1600 and 1625, "only twenty-six survived upon the stage in the middle of the eighteenth century: in 1825, five; and after 1850, but one,—'A New Way to Pay Old Debts,'—while at the present day no fewer than sixteen out of Shakespeare's seventeen comedies are fixtures upon the stage." Now and then a favorite Elizabethan play like Ben Jonson's "Alchemist," or Dekker's "Shoemaker's Holiday," or Beaumont and Fletcher's "Knight of the Burning Pestle" is presented by amateurs before a college audience or a dramatic club, or some other semi-private bunch of spectators. Middleton's "Spanish Gipsy" was thus presented in 1898 before the Elizabethan Stage Society and was rather roughly handled by the newspaper critics. But these are literary curiosities and mean something very different from the retention of a play on the repertoire of the professional public theatres. It is a case of revival, not of survival.

But even if Shakespeare's plays should cease to be shown,—a thing by no means impossible, since theatrical conditions change,—they would never cease to be read. Already he has a hundred readers for one spectator. And one proof of this eternity of fame is the extent to which his language has taken possession of the English tongue. In Bartlett's "Dictionary of Quotations" there

are over one hundred and twenty pages of citations from Shakespeare, including hundreds of expressions which are in daily use and are as familiar as household words. These include not merely maxims and sentences universally current, such as "Brevity is the soul of wit," "The course of true love never did run smooth," "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin," but detached phrases: "wise saws and modern instances," "a woman's reason," "the sere, the yellow leaf," "damnable iteration," "sighing like a furnace," "the funeral baked meats," "the primrose path of dalliance," "a bright, particular star," "to gild refined gold, to paint the lily," "the bubble reputation," "Richard's himself again," "Such stuff as dreams are made on." There is only one other book—the English Bible—which has so wrought itself into the very tissue of our speech. This is not true of the work of Shakespeare's fellow dramatists. I cannot, at the moment, recall any words of theirs that have this stamp of universal currency except Christopher Marlowe's "Love me little, so you love me long." Coleridge prophesied that the works of the other Elizabethan playwrights would in time be reduced to notes on Shakespeare: i.e., they would be used simply to illustrate or explain difficult passages in Shakespeare's text. This is an extreme state-

ment and I cannot believe it true. For the dramas of Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Marlowe, Webster, Middleton, and many others will never lack readers, though they will find them not among general readers, but among scholars, men of letters, and those persons, not so very few in number, who have a strong appetite for plays of all kinds. Moreover, vast as is the distance between Shakespeare and his contemporaries, historically he was one of them. The stage was his occasion, his opportunity. Without the Elizabethan theatre there would have been no Shakespeare. Let us seek to get some idea, then, of what this Elizabethan drama was, which formed the Shakespearean background and environment. Of course, in the short space at my disposal, I cannot take up individual authors, still less individual plays. I shall have to give a very general outline of the matter as a whole.

What is loosely called the Elizabethan drama, consists of the plays written, performed, or printed in England between the accession of the queen in 1558 and the closing of the theatres by the Long Parliament at the breaking out of the civil war in 1642. But if we are looking for work of literary and artistic value, we need hardly go back of 1576, the date of the building of the first London playhouse. This was soon followed

by others and by the formation of permanent stock companies. Heretofore there had been bands of strolling players, under the patronage of various noblemen, exhibiting sometimes at court, sometimes in innyards, bear-baiting houses, and cockpits, and even in churches. Plays of an academic character both in Latin and English had also been performed at the universities and the inns of court. But now the drama had obtained a local habitation and a certain professional independence. Actors and playwriters could make a living—some of them, indeed, like Burbage, Alleyn, and Shakespeare made a very substantial living, or even became rich and endowed colleges (Dulwich College, e.g.). One Henslow, an owner and manager, had at one time three theatres going and a long list of dramatic authors on his payroll; was, in short, a kind of Elizabethan theatrical syndicate, and from Henslow's diary we learn most of what we know about the business side of the old drama. In those days London was a walled town of not more than 125,000 inhabitants. As five theatre companies, and sometimes seven, counting the children of Paul's and of the Queen's Chapel, were all playing at the same time, a public of that size was fairly well served. You have doubtless read descriptions, or seen pictures, of these old playhouses, The Theatre, The Cur-

tain, The Rose, The Swan, The Fortune, The Globe, The Belle Savage, The Red Bull, The Black Friars. They varied somewhat in details of structure and arrangement, and some points about them are still uncertain, but their general features are well ascertained. They were built commonly outside the walls, at Shoreditch or on the Bankside across the Thames, in order to be outside the jurisdiction of the mayor and council, who were mostly Puritan and were continually trying to stop the show business. They were of wood, octagonal on the outside, circular on the inside, with two or three tiers of galleries, partitioned off in boxes. The stage and the galleries were roofed, but the pit, or yard, was unroofed and unpaved; the ordinary, twopenny spectators unaccommodated with seats but *standing* on the bare ground and being liable to a wetting if it rained. The most curious feature of the old playhouse to a modern reader is the stage. This was not, as in our theatres, a recessed or picture frame stage, but a platform stage, which projected boldly out into the auditorium. The "groundlings" or yard spectators, surrounded it on three sides, and it was about on a level with their shoulders. The building specifications for The Swan playhouse called for an auditorium fifty-five feet across, the stage to be twenty-seven feet in depth, so

that it reached halfway across the pit, and was entirely open on three sides. At the rear of the stage was a traverse, or draw curtain, with an alcove, or small inner stage behind it, and a balcony overhead. There was little or no scenery, but properties of various kinds were in use, chairs, beds, tables, etc. When it is added to this that shilling spectators were allowed to sit upon the stage, where for an extra sixpence they were accommodated with stools, and could send the pages for pipes and tobacco, and that from this vantage ground they could jeer at the actors, and exchange jokes and sometimes missiles, like nuts or apples, with the common people in the pit, why, it becomes almost incomprehensible to the modern mind how the players managed to carry on the action at all; and fairly marvellous how under such rude conditions, the noble blank verse declamations and delicate graces of romantic poetry with which the old dramas abound could have got past. A modern audience will hardly stand poetry, or anything, in fact, but brisk action and rapid dialogue. Cut out the soliloquies, cut out the reflections and the descriptions. Elizabethan plays are stuffed with full-length descriptions of scenes and places: Dover Cliff; the apothecary's shop where Romeo bought the poison; the brook in which Ophelia drowned herself; the forest spring

where Philaster found Bellario weeping and playing with wild flowers. In this way they make up for the want of stage scenery. It would seem as if the seventeenth century audiences were more naïve than twentieth century ones, more willing to lend their imaginations to the artist, more eager for strong sensation and more impressible by beauty of language, and less easily disturbed by the incongruous and the absurd in the external machinery of the theatre, which would be fatal to illusion in modern audiences with our quick sense of the ridiculous. You know, for example, that there were no actresses on the Elizabethan stage, but the female parts were taken by boys. This is one practical reason for those numerous plots in the old drama where the heroine disguises herself as a young man. I need mention only Viola, Portia, Rosalind, Imogen, and Julia in Shakespeare. And the romantic plays of Beaumont and Fletcher and many others are full of similar situations. Now if you have seen college dramatics, where the same practice obtains, you have doubtless noticed an inclination in the spectators to laugh at the deep bass voices, the masculine strides, and the muscular arms of the ladies in the play. But trifles like these did not apparently trouble our simple forefathers.

In the eighty-four years from the begin-

ning of Elizabeth's reign to the closing of the theatres we know the names of 200 writers who contributed to the stage, and there were beside many anonymous pieces. All told, there were produced over 1500 plays; and if we count masques and pageants, and court and university plays, and other quasi-dramatic species the number does not fall much short of 2000. Less than half of these are now extant. It is not probable that any important play of Shakespeare's is lost, although no collection of his plays was made until 1623, seven years after his death. Meanwhile about half of them had come out singly in small quartos, surreptitiously issued and very incorrectly printed. We probably have all, or nearly all, of Beaumont and Fletcher's fifty-three plays. And Ben Jonson collected his own works carefully and saw them through the press. But Thomas Heywood wrote, either alone or in collaboration, upwards of 220, and of these only twenty-four remain. Dekker is credited with seventy-six and Rowley with fifty-five, comparatively few of which are now known to exist. One reason why such a large proportion of the Elizabethan plays is missing, is that the theatre companies which owned the stage copies were unwilling to have them printed and thereby made accessible to readers and liable to be pirated by other com-

panies. Manuscript plays were a valuable asset, and were likely to remain in manuscript until they were destroyed or disappeared. There are still many unpublished plays of that period. Thus the manuscript of one of Heywood's missing plays was discovered and printed as late as 1885. A curious feature of the old drama was the practice of collaboration. A capital instance of this was the long partnership of Beaumont and Fletcher. But often three, or sometimes four dramatists collaborated in a single piece. It is difficult, often impossible, to assign the different parts of the play to the respective authors and much critical ingenuity has been spent upon the problem, often with very inconclusive results. To increase the difficulty of assigning a certain authorship, many old plays were worked over into new versions. It is surmised that Shakespeare himself collaborated with Fletcher in "Henry VIII," as well as in "The Two Noble Kinsmen," a tragi-comedy which is not included in the Shakespeare folio; that in "Henry VI" he simply revamped old chronicle-history plays; that "Hamlet" was founded on a lost original by Kyd; that "Titus Andronicus" and possibly "Richard III" owe a great deal to Marlowe; and that the underplot of "The Taming of the Shrew" and a number of scenes in "Timon of Athens"

were composed, not by Shakespeare but by some unknown collaborator. In short we are to look upon the Elizabethan theatre as a great factory and school of dramatic art, producing at its most active period, the last ten years of the queen's reign, say, from 1593-1603, some forty or fifty new plays every year: masters and scholars working together in partnership, not very careful to claim their own, not very scrupulous about helping themselves to other people's literary property: something like the mediaeval guilds who built the cathedrals; or the schools of Italian painters in the fifteenth century, where it is not always possible to determine whether a particular piece of work is by the master painter or by one of the pupils in his workshop. Instances of collaboration are not unknown in modern drama. Robert Louis Stevenson and W. E. Henley wrote several plays in partnership. Charles Reade in his comedy, "Masks and Faces," called in the aid of Tom Taylor, who was an actor and practical maker of plays. But these are exceptions. Modern dramatic authorship is individual: Elizabethan was largely corporate. And the mention of Tom Taylor reminds me that Elizabethan drama was, in an important degree, the creation of the actor-playwright. Peele, Jonson, Shakespeare, Heywood, Munday, and Rowley certainly,

Marlowe, Kyd, Greene, and many others probably, were actors as well as authors. Beaumont's father was a judge, and Fletcher's father was the Bishop of London, but they lodged near the playhouses, and consorted with Shakespeare and Ben Jonson at the Mermaid or the Devil Tavern or the Triple Tun or the other old Elizabethan ordinaries which were the meeting places of the wits. In fact, it is evident that the university wits; the Bohemians and hack writers in Henslow's pay; gentlemen and men with professions, who wrote on the side, such as Thomas Lodge who was a physician; in short, the whole body of Elizabethan dramatists kept themselves in close touch with the actual stage. The Elizabethan drama was a popular, yes, a national institution. All classes of people frequented the rude wooden playhouses, some of which are reckoned to have held 3000 spectators. The theatre was to the public of that day what the daily newspaper, the ten-cent pictorial magazine, the popular novel, the moving picture show, the concert, and the public lecture all combined are to us. And I might almost add the club, the party caucus, and the political speech. For though there were social convivial gatherings like Ben Jonson's Apollo Club, which met at the Devil Tavern, the playhouse was a place of daily resort. And there were political plays. Mid-

dleton's "A Game at Chess," e.g., which attracted enormous crowds and had the then unexampled run of nine successive performances, was a satirical attack on the foreign policy of the government; in which the pieces of the game were thinly disguised representatives of well-known public personages, after the manner of Aristophanes. The Spanish ambassador, Gondomar, who figured as the Black Knight, remonstrated with the privy council, the further performance of the play was forbidden, and the author and several of the company were sent to prison. Similarly the comedy of "Eastward Ho!" written by Jonson, Chapman, Marston, and Dekker, which made fun of James I's Scotch knights, gave great offense to the king, and was stopped and all hands imprisoned. The Earl of Essex had the tragedy of "Richard II," perhaps Shakespeare's,—or perhaps another play on the same subject,—rehearsed before his fellow conspirators just before the outbreak of his rebellion, and the players found themselves arrested for treason.

The English drama was self-originated and self-developed, like the Spanish, but unlike the classical stages of Italy and France. Coming down from the old scriptural and allegorical plays, the miracles and moralities of the Middle Ages, it began to lay its hands on subject matter of all sorts: Italian and

Spanish romances and pastorals, the chronicles of England, contemporary French history, ancient history and mythology, Bible stories and legends of saints and martyrs, popular ballad and folklore, everyday English life and the dockets of the criminal courts. It treated all this miscellaneous stuff with perfect freedom, striking out its own methods. Admitting influences from many quarters, it naturally owed something to the classic drama, the Latin tragedies of Seneca, and the comedies of Plautus and Terence, but it did not allow itself to be shackled by classical rules and models, like the rule of the three unities; or the precedent which forbade the mixture of tragedy and comedy in the same play; or the other precedents which allowed only three speakers on the stage at once and kept all violent action off the scene, to be reported by a messenger, rather than pass before the eyes of spectators. The Elizabethans favored strong action, masses of people, spectacular elements: mobs, battles, single combats, trial scenes, deaths, processions. The English instinct was for quantity of life, the Greek and the French for neatness of construction. The ghost which stalks in Elizabethan tragedy: in "Hamlet," "Richard III," Kyd's "The Spanish Tragedy," and Marston's "Antonio and Mellida" comes straight from Seneca. But except

for a few direct imitations of Latin plays like "Gorboduc" and "The Misfortunes of Arthur"—mostly academic performances—Elizabethan tragedy was not at all Senecan in construction. Let us take a few forms of drama, which, though not strictly peculiar to our sixteenth century theatre, were most representative of it, and were the forms in which native genius expressed itself most characteristically. I will select the tragi-comedy, the chronicle-history, and the romantic melodrama or tragedy of blood. In 1579 Sir Philip Sidney, who was a classical scholar, complained that English plays were neither right tragedies nor right comedies, but mongrel tragi-comedies which mingled kings and clowns, funerals and hornpipes. Nearly a century and a half later, Addison, also a classical scholar, wrote: "The tragi-comedy, which is the product of the English theatre, is one of the most monstrous inventions that ever entered into a poet's thoughts. An author might as well think of weaving the adventures of Aeneas and Hudibras into one poem as of writing such a motley piece of mirth and sorrow." Sidney's and Addison's principles would have condemned about half the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. As to the chronicle-history play, Ben Jonson, who was a classicist writing in a romantic age, had his fling at those

who with "some few foot and half-foot words fight over York and Lancaster's long jars." I do not know that any other nation possesses anything quite like this series of English kings by Shakespeare, Marlowe, Bale, Peele, Ford, and many others, which taken together cover nearly four centuries of English history. You know that the Duke of Marlboro said that all he knew of English history he had learned from Shakespeare's plays; and these big, patriotic military dramas must have given a sort of historical education to the audiences of their time. The material, to be sure, was much of it epic rather than properly dramatic, and in the hands of inferior artists it remained lumpy and shockingly crude. To obtain comic relief, the playwrights sandwiched in between the serious parts, scenes of horseplay, buffoonery, and farce, which had little to do with the history. But in the hands of a great artist, all this was reduced to harmony. Henry IV, Part I, is not only a great literary work, but a first-class acting play. The tragedy is very high tragedy and the Falstaff scenes very broad comedy, but they are blended so skilfully that each heightens the effect of the other without disturbing the unity of impression. As to the romantic melodrama or tragedy of blood, the Elizabethans had a strong appetite for sensation,

and many of their most powerful plays were of this description: Marlowe's "Tamburlaine," Shakespeare's "Lear," Beaumont and Fletcher's "Maid's Tragedy," Middleton's "Changeling," Webster's "Duchess of Malfi," and scores of others, which employ what has been called solution by massacre, and whose stage in the fifth act is as bloody as a shambles. Even in the best of these, great art is required to reconcile the nerves of the modern reader to the numerous killings. In the extreme examples of the type, like "Titus Andronicus" (doubtfully Shakespeare's), Marlowe's "Jew of Malta," or the old "Spanish Tragedy," or Cyril Tourneur's "Revenger's Tragedy," the theme is steeped so deeply in horrors and monstrosities, that it passes over into farce. For the great defect of Elizabethan drama is excess, extravagance. In very few plays outside of Shakespeare do we find that naturalness, that restraint, decorum and moderation which is a part of the highest and finest art. Too many of the plots and situations are fantastically improbable: too many of the passions and characters strained and exaggerated, though life and vigor are seldom wanting. This is seen in their comedies as well as in their tragedies. Thus, Ben Jonson, an admirable comic artist, ranking next, I think, after Shakespeare, a very learned man and ex-

haustless in observation and invention; very careful, too, in construction and endeavoring a reform of comedy along truly classical lines —Ben Jonson, I say, chose for his province the comedy of humors; i.e., the exhibition of all varieties of oddity, eccentricity, whim, affectation. Read his "Every Man in His Humour" or his "Bartholomew Fair" and you will find a satirical picture of all the queer fashions and follies of his contemporary London. His characters are sharply distinguished but they are *too* queer, too overloaded with traits, so that we seem to be in an asylum for cranks and monomaniacs, rather than in the broad, natural, open daylight of Shakespeare's creations. So the tyrants and villains of Elizabethan melodrama are too often incredible creatures beyond the limits of humanity.

It is perhaps due to their habit of mixing tragedy and comedy that the Elizabethan dramatists made so much use of the double plot; for the main plot was often tragical and the underplot comical or farcical. Shakespeare, who at all points was superior to his fellows, knew how to knit his duplicate plots together and make them interdependent. But in pieces like Middleton's "Changeling" or "The Mayor of Queensboro," the main plot and the subplot have nothing to do with each other and simply run

along in alternate scenes, side by side. This is true of countless plays of the time and is ridiculed by Sheridan in his burlesque play "The Critic." Let it also be remembered that an Elizabethan tragedy was always a poem—always in verse. Prose was reserved for comedy, or for the comedy scenes in a tragedy. The only prose tragedy that has come down to us from those times is the singular little realistic piece entitled "The Yorkshire Tragedy," the story of a murder. A very constant feature of the old drama was the professional fool, jester, or kept clown, with his motley coat, truncheon, and cap and bells. In most plays he was simply a stock fun maker, though Shakespeare made a profound and subtle use of him in "As You Like It" and in "Lear." The last court jester or king's fool was Archie Armstrong, fool of Charles I. After the Restoration he was considered as old-fashioned and disappeared from the stage along with puns and other obsolete forms of wit. Opera and pantomime were not introduced into England until late in the seventeenth century: but the Elizabethans had certain forms of quasi-dramatic entertainment such as the court masque, the pageant, and the pastoral, which have since gone out. They were responsible for some fine poetry like Fletcher's "Faithful Shepherdess," Jonson's fragment "The Sad Shep-

herd" and Milton's "Comus." Of late years the pageant has been locally revived in England, at Oxford, at Coventry, and elsewhere.

Now since it has ceased to be performed, what is the value of the old drama, as literature, as a body of reading plays? Of the 200 known writers for the theatre, ten at least were men of creative genius, Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare, Jonson, Dekker, Webster, Middleton, Fletcher, Beaumont, and Massinger. At least a dozen more were men of high and remarkable talents, Lyly, Peele, Greene, Marston, Ford, Heywood, Shirley, Tourneur, Kyd, Day, Rowley, Brome. Scarcely one of them but has contributed single scenes of great excellence, or invented one or two original and interesting characters, or written passages of noble blank verse and lovely lyrics. Even the poorest of them were inheritors or partakers of a great poetic tradition, a gift of style, so that, in plays very defective, as a whole, we are constantly coming upon lines of startling beauty like Middleton's

Ha! what art thou that taks't away the light
Betwixt that star and me?

or Marston's

Night, like a masque, has entered heaven's high hall,
With thousand torches ushering the way.

or Beaumont's

> Cover her face: mine eyes dazzle: she died young.

But when all has been said, and in spite of enthusiasts like Lamb and Hazlitt and Swinburne, I fear it must be acknowledged that, outside of Shakespeare, our old dramatists produced no plays of the absolutely first rank; no tragedies so perfect as those of Sophocles and Euripides; no comedies equal to Molière's. Nay, I would go further, and affirm that not only has the Elizabethan drama—excluding Shakespeare—nothing to set against the first part of Goethe's "Faust," but that its best plays are inferior, as a whole, to the best of Aristophanes, of Calderon, of Racine, of Schiller, even perhaps of Victor Hugo, Sheridan and Beaumarchais. It is as Coleridge said: great beauties, counterbalanced by great faults. Ben Jonson is heavy-handed and laborious; Beaumont and Fletcher graceful, fluent and artistic, but superficial and often false in characterization; Webster, intense and powerful in passion, but morbid and unnatural; Middleton, frightfully uneven; Marlowe and Chapman high epic poets but with no flexibility and no real turn for drama.

Yet unsatisfactory as it is, when judged by any single play, the work of the Eliza-

bethans, when viewed as a whole, makes an astonishing impression of fertility, of force, of range, variety, and richness, both in invention and in expression.

PRINTED BY E. L. HILDRETH & COMPANY,
BRATTLEBORO, VERMONT, U. S. A.

KENYON COLLEGE LIBRARY

Date Due

KENYON COLLEGE LIBRARIES
0 0000 0200564 3
WITHDRAWN

Beers, Henry A
AUTHOR

804
B39

Connecticut Wits
TITLE
& other essays

48124

DATE DUE	BORROWER'S NAME

804
B39

48124